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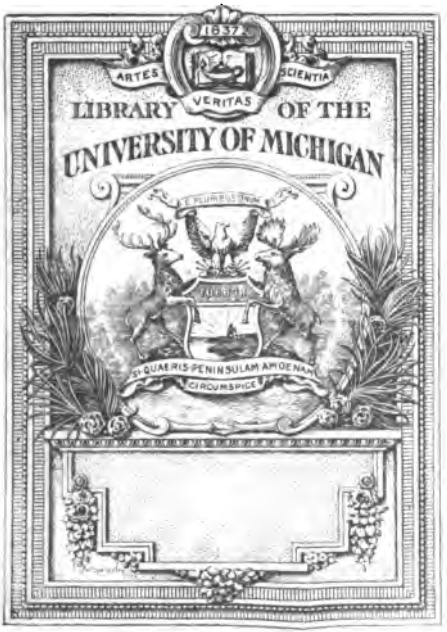
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WILD EELIN

HER ESCAPADES, ADVENTURES, AND BITTER SORROWS

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF

"A DAUGHTER OF HETH," "MACLEOD OF DARE," "BRISEIS,"

ETC. ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1898.

Loud winds, low winds, to every maid her lover,
Where'er the sunlight shines, where'er the shadows hover;
But my dear love comes never, oh, never, back to me,
Nor by the shore, nor by the hills, nor by the Northern Sea.

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WILD EELIN.

CHAPTER I.

ALIENS.

THE calm of a Sabbath morning lay all along the wide valley; not a sound disturbed the perfect silence, save now and again the call of a curlew or the soft winnowing of a pesewepe's wings; the pools in the Garva river—deep and dark and tea-brown under the wooded banks, but of a bold clear turquoise blue out in the open—were still as glass; while the shadows down by the ford, where the water raced and chased and glanced and glittered over the beds of pebbles, were so far away that the continuous smooth murmur of them was hardly audible in the basking and sunlit air. The heather was just getting to its richest bloom; so that the knolls and slopes and lower heights showed every hue and gradation of warm rose-lilac, touched here and there with the yellowish-green of the bracken; but above and beyond these the mountainous hills stretching to the west—the great undulating masses that looked out and over to Knoidart, and Glenelg, and Skye—were of a pale and

ethereal azure, receding, billow after billow, and billow after billow, under the cloudless dome.

In the midst of this strath stands Kinvaig House, once the plain, and bare, and unpretentious ancestral home of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig, but now transformed into a modern shooting-lodge, with bay-windowed additions, kennels, and keepers' cottages, all complete. And on this particular morning the profound sleep and silence that prevailed within the main building appeared to have extended to the outlying dependencies as well; there was no sign of life anywhere; if the people were awake—and surely they were awake at this hour—they did not choose to stir abroad; the little hamlet was as the home of the dead. Indeed, it is a peculiarity of the Scottish peasant that, except in going to or returning from church—when there happens to be a church within reach—he is shy of showing himself on Sundays; he prefers the inside of his dwelling and a godly book.

But of a sudden the all-pervading stillness was broken in upon; the front door of the lodge was thrown open with a clang; and there stepped forth a young man, bareheaded, and in evening dress. He was about six-and-twenty; undersized and stout; of irregular and podgy features and pasty complexion; clean-shaven; his blue-grey eyes looking bleared and bemused in unexpectedly facing the light; his close-cropped fair hair unkempt; his white neck-tie awry. In short, this person—who bore no less a name and title than George Reginald Talbot Fitz-Ingram Taylyour, fifth Marquess of Mountmahon—had a general aspect of being partly butler and partly prize-fighter, with a dash of pot-boy thrown in; while it was evident that he had been asleep in these evening gar-

ments; and this in truth was the literal fact, for he had just stumbled along from the gun-room, where he had passed the last half-dozen hours.

At once the uproar began.

"Here! Hi! Macalister!—Sandy!—Colin!—where the devil have you all got to?" he bellowed. "I want the dogs let out! Hi! Angus!—where the blazes are you?"

He stepped back into the hall, and returned with a whip, the horn handle of which contained a whistle; and on this instrument he blew and blew with a ferocity that sent the echoes flying along the hollow glen. In the midst of the clamour the under-sash of a window was raised, and a head looked out. It was the head of a young woman, of rather attractive appearance, only that the beraddled face gave evidence that her pillow had not wholly robbed her complexion of its over-night powder and rouge.

"Oh, kennel up, you silly fool!" she called down to him, in accents of equal anger and scorn. "You silly idiot, why don't you let other people sleep, if you can't sleep yourself! Go and smother your head in a hay-stack!"

He did not pay any attention to her taunts; but at this very moment her ladyship's pet spaniel, excited by the noise and confusion, came rushing and barking along the hall. Whether it did mean to tear the podgy young man's clothing it is impossible to say; but, at all events, he seemed to think so; for directly it reached the door-step he struck at it viciously with his whip, and the next second it was howling and yelping through the hall again.

"You —— brute!" said the young woman with the patchwork face, and her eyes were glittering with rage.

She vanished for an instant, and immediately reappeared; and now she held in both hands a large ewer, which she heaved bodily out. It missed the young man by just an inch or two, falling on the flagstone with a terrific crash, and splintering into a thousand fragments. He noticed the smash, of course; but otherwise he did not seem to comprehend what had occurred. This poor, stupid, besotted oaf standing there did not know that he had been within an ace of discovering the Great Secret—the secret that has absorbed the longings and aspirations of the wisest of the earth since ever the human race began to think and wonder.

But the bawling and yelling had not been without result. There emerged into the sunlight, from the door of one of the cottages, a tall, thin, quiet-visaged elderly man, who looked to see what was the matter; and then, in obedience to a further peremptory summons, he crossed the open space of greensward and came along the carriage-drive. As he drew nearer, he regarded in a concerned and scared way the shattered fragments of the ewer that lay about on the flagstone and on the adjacent gravel; but his lordship did not vouchsafe any explanation.

"Here, you, Angus," he said, abruptly, "go and put my rod together, and bring it down to the Corran Pool. And the gaff, and my fly-book."

The old man seemed hardly willing to believe his ears.

"I'm sure," said he, very gently and respectfully,

"your lordship will not be remembering—it's the Sabbath morning——"

"What's that to me, or to you, either? Go and get the rod—and at once!"

"I am not wishing to displease your lordship," said the grey-haired man with the deeply-lined brow and rather sad and sunken eyes, "I am not wishing that at all——"

"Then you refuse?" said the pot-boy.

"Your lordship," pleaded the other, "I am not wishing to displease your lordship; but I have lived in Glengarva for over sixty years, and I was never asked before to go fishing with a gentleman on the Sabbath day. And I would not like my daughter to be hearing of it—or any that's related to me—or the minister——"

"Hold your row, then. You refuse?"

There was no answer—and no show of stubbornness: only silence, and resignation.

"Very well," continued the pot-boy, vindictively—or as vindictively as his thick speech allowed—"very well. Out you pack. Do you hear? I'll give you twenty minutes to start off from this neighbourhood; and you can send for your things when you like. Do you understand, now? And don't you imagine Sir Charles Orme will interfere. He knows when he has a good tenant. I'm the master here. Do you understand, now? Out you go—I give you twenty minutes."

The grave-faced old fisherman probably saw that no protest would avail him.

"As your lordship wills," he said, submissively; and with that he turned and left.

A few minutes thereafter his lordship might have

been seen wending his solitary way across the wide strath—a strange, black, bizarre figure in this sunlit world of light yellows and greys and greens. Apparently his dazed brain had abandoned or forgotten his project of going fishing, for he carried no rod, but all the same his uncertain steps were leading him to the river. And at length, when he did reach the Corran Pool—at this point the stream is shallow on the hither side, with level banks of sand, but on the further side it runs deep and dark under a steep brae hanging with birches—at this point he stopped and looked vaguely and aimlessly about him, as if not knowing how he had come there. Then he began to strip, throwing his clothes carelessly to the ground; then the mother-naked man waded in; then the yielding shingle gave way underneath his feet; finally he plunged forward into the deeper water, and struck out. He was a good swimmer—his body being built that way; and presently he was going well, hand over hand, with his legs jerking behind him like the legs of a frog, and yellow as the legs of a frog, by reason of the brown of the water. But if he was fat, he was also scant of breath; ere long he was on the bank again, puffing and blowing, and wiping the water from his eyes and from the short and stubbly hair of his bullet head. And then—as the morning was sunny and warm—and as he was fatigued—and as he had a habit of humouring the whim of the moment—he pulled on part of his underclothing, to dry himself, he rolled up his waistcoat and put it on the sand to serve as a pillow, he lay down and dragged his crumpled dress-coat over him, and in about a couple of seconds was fast asleep.

And now it was that two others came strolling across

the spacious valley. The one was Lady Mountmahon, who had found time to re-incarnadine her cheeks, and make up her heavily-marked eyebrows and eyelashes, and arrange the abundant masses of chaff-coloured hair that flaunted themselves to the sun. She wore a loose morning gown of light green satin, and a Balmoral bonnet of rose-red velvet that had an eagle's feather struck on one side of it. Her companion was a short and slim young man, of cadaverous hue, whose odd expression of eye and twisted mouth seemed to say that if he were not a comic actor then he had thrown away the chances bestowed upon him by a beneficent fate: indeed there was little doubt of his being what he himself would probably have called a "pro." of some kind or other, just as Lady Mountmahon herself had been, when she was famous as Carrie Milton of the metropolitan music-halls. This Mr. Arthur Hoskins, now walking with her, was clad in a knickerbocker suit of the most violent pattern—just about sufficient to bring down a grouse-cock at fifty yards; but as he had not attempted the kilt, much must be forgiven him. Both of them were talking and jesting merrily; their laughter was loud in the hushed autumn air.

But presently she said—

"Arthur, *mon vieux,* I'm afraid the whole of us are a bit dotty this morning, after the wild games of last night. Do you know I came near to splitting open Mounty's skull about an hour ago—though you mayn't think that possible. Oh, but it's true. He slashed my poor Tartarin with that heavy dog-whip of his; and I was so mad with rage I pitched an empty ewer at him from the window——"

"Ewer the pitcher, in fact," he observed, with a professional grin.

"You don't appear to recognise the gravity of the situation," she replied, coolly. "It was very near kingdom come with that gay youth. And then what does he go and do? Why, he goes and sacks old Angus! What next? First the head-keeper; now the water-bailiff. Do you think Sir Charles Orme will stand it? No, he won't! He's not such a Jay. These people do look after his interests. But I suppose Mounty wants to get every decent and respectable person turned off the estate, so that we shall be left to ourselves. And we're a pretty crew!"

"Some of us are, your ladyship," her companion said, politely. "Others of us have no pretensions that way."

"Well, I won't let Angus go!" she said, with frowning brows. "Blessed if I do! He's a pal o' mine. A decent, respectable old man like that; why, there's not one of us fit to black his boots——"

"I am—I admit it," Hoskins put in, penitently.

"Well, he's not going to leave!" she continued, hotly. "The decent old man! He shall not leave—he shall not! I'll see Mounty —— first—and that's all about it!"

Her eyes were at this moment attracted by some black object lying ahead of them.

"And what's he up to now? What *is* he up to now?" she cried, in tones of hopeless vexation. "Look at him! Sleeping on the ground! Another dress-suit gone—twenty guineas chucked—when you've got to take a corkscrew to get a fiver out of him——"

But as they drew nearer and nearer to that motionless heap that lay prone on the sand, her scrutiny had

been growing more and more curious and suspicious; and at last she uttered a piercing shriek, and stopped, and shrank back.

"He's dead!" she screamed, regarding the lifeless bundle with horror. "It's a corpse! I won't go near it! I won't touch it!——"

Her companion went quickly on.

"He's all right, Lady Mountmahon," he said, "only a little out of gear. If your ladyship will kindly turn your head for a minute, I'll set him on his pins, and get him into his clothes."

It was a difficult matter, for the drowsy man was sulky and sullen; but after a time—with much patience on one side, and a good deal of cursing on the other—the task was accomplished. And then his lordship had to face his wife.

"Aren't you sober yet, old Sleepitoff?" she demanded, scornfully.

"I'm hungry," he said, with half-opened eyes.

"Hungry?" she retorted—and she had a raucous tongue when she chose. "Then it's whiskey-hunger, and that's what it is. You had supper at five o'clock this morning, and you were gorging like a hog and drinking like a fish."

"Oh, hold your jaw, or I'll brain you!" he muttered. "Here, Arthur, give me a cigar."

"Arthur, you won't do anything of the kind," she interposed, peremptorily. "As for you, old muddle-head, do you want to be made sick? And I wonder how we're going to get you smuggled into the house, without the servants seeing you! An elegant object you are, to be sure! They might set you up for a

scarecrow, if only you looked a little more like a man——"

"Will you hold your row, you gutter-snipe, or I'll gouge your eyes out!" his lordship growled. But there was no great danger in the threat—and she knew it.

Indeed, something else now claimed her attention, as she kept glancing eagerly forward. The silent lodge they had left amid its pastoral surroundings had been transformed into a scene of feverish activity; the members of the house-party had all come outside, and were as busy as ants; the gentlemen were carrying dishes, joints, knives, forks, crystal, and the like; the ladies were engaged in laying out a table that had been brought on to the lawn; this one called to that, and that to this; gaudy costumes flitted to and fro; a kind of witches' carnival seemed in progress, with an abundance of bandied jibes and giggling.

"And why the—who the—what the—mischief are they doing now?" exclaimed the hostess of these people.

"I should say they were going to give us breakfast, or luncheon, or whatever it is, out of doors," replied Arthur Hoskins.

"Oh, very well," she said, good-naturedly. And then she turned to her husband. "Here, wake up, Mounty, man! Wake up, and give yourself a show. You know you're not such a bad old crock, if you wouldn't go and drink yourself blind." She dusted the sand from his clothes, and tried to make him look a little more presentable. "We'll start you on a tumbler of fizz, and that will put some life into you. I see they've told the servants to keep indoors. Quite right. You'll have to take the head of the table, and I'm sure

you'll be a beautiful example to all of us, in the way of sobriety, and wisdom, and wit."

And at last the things were ready; the host and hostess took their places; and at once the riff-raff crowd began their carouse. There was a tea-urn on the table, it is true; but it was not brought into requisition; for standing well in evidence were a few bottles of champagne, and when these had been passed round and exhausted, Lady Mountmahon kept sending one of her "boys," as she called them, for more, and more, and more: so that in time the fictitious mirth rose to an extraordinary pitch. Everyone was talking at once; no one heeding the other; even a loudly-challenged statement gave no pause; jeers and derisive laughter provoked no retort; so fiercely and furiously did the wassail rage. But when the delights of eating and drinking were beginning to pall, it occurred to a cunning youth who had brought out his banjo with him that he could not only vary the programme but also check this flooded torrent of excited verbiage. He got the instrument from under his chair, and twanged a few chords, which were instantly recognised.

"Let's have it, Johnny!" bawled his lordship, who was now as vociferous and hilarious as any of them.

The tumult momentarily ceased; and in the unnatural calm that followed a thin, cracked voice arose, recounting the adventures of a certain Sairey Jane. It was a poor, weak, contemptible performance—the only strength of it lying in its coarse suggestiveness; but at the end of each verse the whole table came in with an exultant, strident, discordant chorus—

"Now mind you, Sairey Jane,
Whatever you may do,
That the missus,
O the missus,
That the missus can play pranks as well as you."

Then someone called out "A Barn-Door!"—and someone else called out "Yes, a Barn-Door!" and their hostess, jumping to her feet, cried aloud "Very well: get your partners!"—at which there was a scrambling up from the table, and a general snatching and pushing and shuffling that gradually resolved itself until the expectant couples waited the signal from the banjo. Now the "Barn-Door" can be danced with perfect propriety: it can also be danced with impropriety, not to say indecency, according to the temperament of the onlooker; and on this occasion, as soon as the banjo had started them off, it was pretty obvious that these people meant to "let themselves go." Nay, they warmed to their work —those hot-eyed Bacchanals and frenzied Corybantes: there were collisions, and shrieks that startled the still air; the women vied with each other in their display of white under-skirt; the men roared with laughter in encouraging them. In short—for the subject is not an alluring one—it looked as if hell had broken loose in Glengarva, on this peaceful Sabbath morning; but a tawdry, vulgar, sordid hell; the hell of Piccadilly Circus when the music-halls have vomited forth their vilest.

CHAPTER II.

FROM OVER THE SEA.

On this same day an open landau was being driven out from Invergarva, bringing two strangers into the secluded glen. One of them was an old man of striking appearance—an old man of quite unusual stature; his long, flowing beard of a yellowish-white; his pinched and pinkish features speaking of habitual exposure to the weather; a dark blue Balmoral bonnet crowning his picturesque head. His companion was a much younger man—about thirty or so—and not nearly so tall, but of great muscular breadth of frame; his face thoughtful and refined; his clear brown eyes steady and contemplative, and kindly withal. These two were father and son; and the latter was describing to the former—who appeared to be stone-blind—the various points of the landscape as they came into view; though he was continually being interrupted, for the old man kept eagerly suggesting this or that detail borrowed from his own mental picture, to find out if he had remembered rightly, through the long interval of years.

"Yes, yes," he was saying, in an excited fashion—and, if he did not see, he certainly seemed to see, and vividly—"that's the Brae Pool—the steep bank and the bushes—a terrible place for losing flies. And there's a big rock up at the corner—can you make it out, Lad?—and a great black hole underneath—I wonder none of us boys were ever drowned there—when we were after rowans or nuts; and then from the corner there's a wide stretch of shingle and sand leading away along to the Whirl Pool—isn't that so, Somerled?"

"Quite right, father," the other made answer. "And in the middle of the valley, on the shingle, there are the stumps of one or two uprooted trees—nearly white—and half-buried——"

"What, still there?" he exclaimed. "Why, man, these were trees that came down in the great flood!—well I mind it—the water was up to the doorstep of Kinvaig House—and the ferry boat was whirled away along to Farlies. So the big roots are still sticking out of the sand?—to think of that now!—a fine hiding-place they were for us boys for anything the keepers were not to see."

"There appears to be a small church on the top of the hill just in front of us."

"Of course, man, of course! Kinvaig church! But how should you know? And it's a pity there's no service to-day; maybe one or two of the old folk might have remembered the tall teacher. That was my name in the Gaelic—the tall teacher. Ay, I was a long-legged lad; I could put the miles behind me. And so we've come to the steep hill—and the church; there used to be a row of Scotch firs—along the crest——"

"Just beyond the church—yes."

"Well I mind them—well, well; and larches sloping down the other side—a famous place for the roe when we were beating the woods. And the firs—the Scotch firs—they're a landmark: they're visible all the way from Ben-an-Sloich, or Ben Vora, or even as far west as Strathgorm, and they tell to everyone that near by is the old burying-place of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig. My word for it, Somerled, when we bade good-bye a week or two ago to the Macdonalds of the Canadian

Kinvaig, I warrant you there were many of them thinking of the Scotch firs on the crest of the hill."

The horses toiled up the long ascent, and when they had reached the summit, the driver was bidden to halt, in front of the entrance to the church and churchyard. Somerled Macdonald got out first, to assist his father; but, indeed, when the splendid old man stood in the road, bearing his six feet four of height right nobly, he did not look as if he were much in need of help—had it not been for his lack of vision. Then the younger man opened a wooden box that was on the front seat of the carriage, and took therefrom a wreath of evergreens; this he handed to his father; then he placed his fingers lightly on the old man's arm, and the two of them entered the small graveyard on the hill.

These were humble and unpretentious tombstones for the most part, and nearly all of them bearing the name of Macdonald; but there was one of somewhat more importance—a tall Iona cross it was, of red granite—and to this the younger man made his way. His surmise was correct; he read the legend "Æneas John Macdonald of Kinvaig."

"It is just in front of you, father," he said.

The old man felt for his footing, and put out his hand and touched the stone; then he removed his cap, he knelt down on one knee, and reverently placed the wreath at the foot of the cross. In the midst of the cunningly intertwisted evergreens there was a simply-written card bearing these words: "Homage at the grave of our Chief—from the Macdonalds of Kinvaig, Ontario, Canada." Old Allan Macdonald remained kneel-

ing there for several minutes; then he rose—ready to be led away.

"Father," said his son, "the flowers on the grave are quite fresh—they have been recently tended."

"Ay, do ye say that?" the old man responded, quickly. "Maybe, then, the Bean-an-Tighearn * herself and Miss Eelin have been here; it would have been strange if we had met them just at the goal of our pilgrimage. But it is of little matter if we have missed them: they will surely not take it ill if I make so bold as to call on them when we get to Invernish, and tell them of your errand."

Then he paused for a moment, standing very erect, as if he were gazing abroad with his sightless eyes.

"Somerled, tell me all you can see. Tell me all you can see, out to the farthest hills."

It was a difficult task; for Somerled Macdonald had never been in this country-side before, and could only describe by appearances, not by names; but the blind man appeared to recognise feature after feature of the landscape, and followed the recapitulation with intensest interest. And then—having burned the vision into his brain—he suffered himself to be taken back to the carriage; and they resumed their journey.

"For you must see the big house, Lad," he said; "and we'll put up the horses at Bridge of Kinvaig; and maybe we'll find some old body who remembers the tall teacher. And then I would like to go down to the Garva, and sit on the banks for awhile. Indeed, that is what has made me drive out on a Sunday—at the risk of offending some of the stricter folk; but I wanted

* Pronounced *Ben-an-tyearn*—the Laird's Lady.

to hear once more the Sabbath silence of Glengarva. It's the strangest thing. I've never heard it anywhere else; but I remember it well as a boy—the Sabbath morning stillness that you could sit and listen to, just as if all the world was whispering to itself. I wonder if I shall be able to hear it now. Perhaps it's only in youth you can hear it, when you are wandering about alone, and thinking of many things. But I should like to try—now that I am in Glengarva once more—and on a still Sabbath morning. I'm thinking, Somerled, we'll take a bit of a stroll down the strath when once we've left the landau at the inn; I suppose the quiet corners by the river-side are just the same as ever they were."

And so they drove on along the winding valley, until, from the lofty road they were following, they came to overlook a moderately-sized mansion and its dependencies, set in a level space some way back from the stream. But though Somerled Macdonald guessed readily enough that this was Kinvaig House, he did not speak; his whole attention was absorbed by a motley group of people who were lounging in various attitudes around the table out on the lawn, while the array of champagne bottles on the white cloth looked incomprehensible enough at this early hour. Moreover, he could see that one of those persons was twanging away at a banjo; and presently there came the echo—so faint as to be almost inaudible—of a raucous chorus. And then—as he stared and better stared in amazement—behold! those half-recumbent figures sprang to their feet; there were scurryings this way and that; and finally the whole gang broke into a witches' dance of capering and kicking, with flying toes and tossing skirts,

while now and again, even at this distance, the hushed air brought the sound of a brainless yelp or scream. Now young Macdonald had tumbled about the world a good deal; he was tolerant of the manners and customs of other people; but the question was how to get the old man past without his becoming aware of what would doubtless appear to him an absolute horror of desecration. The Sabbath silence of Glengarva?—a Carmagnole instead!

And as ill-luck would have it, old Allan Macdonald's remembrance of his native strath proved to be only too accurate.

"Surely, Lad, we should be about opposite Kinvaig House now?"

"Just down below us, father—out there in the open."

Then the old man would have the carriage stopped, and would have the house minutely described to him—the little square old building and its ivy, the modern wings with their bay windows, the background of shrubbery, and so forth.

"I suppose there's no one about?"

"Not a soul," his son answered, desperately.

"A singular thing now," the old man continued, "I fancied a moment or two ago I heard a sound of singing—distant singing——"

"Oh, that is quite a common delusion, when there's a wide space around you," Somerled rejoined instantly. "I've often seemed to hear that at sea. The fact is, the ear is quite as imaginative as the eye. It plays tricks. It hears imaginary music, just as the eye sees imaginary ghosts—"

"Strange—strange," the old man said—and he was

evidently listening with the concentration peculiar to the blind, "I could almost swear that even now there is some kind of measured tapping—like some musical instrument——"

"Father," said the younger man, affecting to laugh the matter away, "your ear is too fanciful; you'll hear the grass growing next—or Knight Roland blowing his magic horn. Go ahead, driver!" And for the moment that danger was escaped.

But worse was in store. For as they descended from these lofty heights to Bridge of Kinvaig, and crossed the river, the solitary little inn came in view; and here also there was an unwonted tumult. Two men, bare-headed and in shirt-sleeves, were out in the middle of the road, playing pitch-and-toss with half-crowns; a third sat cross-legged on the gravel; a fourth lay at full length on the long box used for holding fishing rods; and all of them were bawling bets at each other, and cursing each other with a cheerful lack of discrimination. Through these worthies a general family resemblance ran—short stature, heavy shoulders, hairless face, bullet head, and more or less broken nose; and if they were too bulbous to be pugilists in proper training, pugilists of some kind they undoubtedly were—pugilists carousing, in fact, for there was a plenitude of tumblers about, and some half-empty champagne bottles stood ranged along the window-sill of the inn. Of course, as the landau drove up, the curiosity of this sorry crew overcame the prevailing clamour; and in the temporary truce Somerled Macdonald hurried his father into the small hostelry—hoping that he had heard nothing.

Fortunately the two travellers were able to secure a

tiny back-parlour to themselves; and when the younger man had rung the bell and asked the servant-lass to get ready what luncheon was procurable, he thought he would saunter out by himself to see what manner of persons these were who had invaded this remote Highland glen. They themselves were not likely to inform him, for as he paused on the threshold, he discovered that a savage quarrel had by this time broken out over the betting, so that the air was thick with oaths and asseverations and crimson adjectives. Indeed, they took no notice of him; and so he strolled on, towards the river; he perceived that a man his father and he had passed on the way was now coming down to the bridge —a decent-looking elderly man with whom he planned to have a few words.

"I beg your pardon, but may I ask if you belong to these parts?" he said to the new-comer.

"I did, sir, until this morning," replied old Angus the fisherman. "I have been living in its strath ever since I was a boy, but I am sent away now."

"How is that?" This younger Macdonald had a curiously direct way of speech, and straightforward eyes; he had the air of one accustomed to govern men.

The story was briefly told.

"Her ladyship was asking me to stay," old Angus added, honestly. "But I am not wishing to make any quarrel."

"And what are you going to do now?" was the next abrupt question.

"I'm going out west to Ben Vora," said the old gillie, in a quiet, resigned way. "My daughter is in service there, at the lodge. And she's a good lass; she

will put up with me for awhile, until I get a new place. But maybe—maybe—I have been thinking—I will be too far on in years to seek for a new place now."

"You need not trouble yourself about that," said Somerled Macdonald, in his curt fashion. "And you need not trouble your daughter either. I will get you a new place, or its equivalent—if you like to trust me."

The old man looked bewildered; he was not used to find good fortune drop from the skies.

"Would the gentleman be telling me his name?" he said, timidly.

"My name? Oh, that's nothing. I daresay you never heard of me. But you've heard of my father, no doubt. He ought to be known in this district. You've heard of Mr. Allan Macdonald, of Canada——"

"Him that was sending the free passes?"

"The same. Well, he is my father. And he is in the inn there. Come along and see him: I shouldn't wonder if you and he had many recollections in common, of former days and the old people. Then we'll get a bit of something to eat; and you'll drive back with us to Invergarva; and to-morrow you'll go on with us to Invernish. I suppose there are several of the Kinvaig Macdonalds in Invernish?"

"Oh yes, that, sir."

"And you wouldn't mind living in a town? If you were to get some employment in Invernish you would feel yourself just as much at home there as here?"

"Far more, sir—far more. There's no home here for me now," answered old Angus.

"Then set your mind at rest," said the younger

man, in a kind of authoritative way—but perhaps his bluntness was due to business habits and a long-acquired habit of saving every minute of time. "I'll get some place for you in Invernish, with not too heavy work; and if you still crave for the river-side, you can have a turn at the Nish, on the free days, you know. So come along and see my father. But first of all, tell me, who are these men in the roadway there?"

"They're the prize-fighters, sir, that his lordship keeps at the inn," was the reply, uttered in a low voice, so that no one should overhear. "And in the evening they go down to the big house, to amuse the gentry."

"God help us all," said Somerled, half to himself, "I wonder how I am going to get my father out of this infernal den, without his suspecting anything? And this is what has come to Glengarva, and to the old home of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig!"

They got through the brawling gang without molestation, and entered the little back-parlour; and greatly delighted was old Allan Macdonald to find a fellow-clansman who could remember the small thatched cottage in which the tall teacher had taught his elementary class, five-and-forty years before. There were all sorts of reminiscences, and eager questions and willing answers; but ever and anon the home-comer from Canada would bring the talk back to the Bean-an-Tighearn and Miss Eelin, the mother and daughter who in a way represented the sentimental chieftainship of the Kinvaig Macdonalds. Where they approachable ladies? They would not take it ill if two strangers—claiming to be of the clan—and hailing from a far country—wished to call on them and pay their respects to them? Or per-

haps they would rather not be reminded of the proud position once held by their family? They might resent intrusion? Well, these were rather recondite questions for the old water-bailiff, who, besides, with all a Highlander's caution, was anxious not to commit himself and give offence; but on one point old Angus was explicit enough.

"There is not in all the Highlands," he said, "two leddies that are as kind as them: I am sure of it. There is nothing they will not try to do for the poor people and the old people of Glengarva: the sewing, and the knitting, and the sending of wool, and the buying of the stockings when they are made. And everyone knows it is not because they are rich, for it is many a day since the estate passed away from the family; but the Bean-an-Tighearn and Miss Eelin they will always be having a little help for anyone that is sick. And there is the parcels-post now-a-days—they have not to come aweh down from Invernish——"

"But I suppose they sometimes pay the old place a visit?"

"Is it Kinvaig?" said old Angus, in obvious surprise —perhaps even in a kind of hurt way. "The Bean-an-Tighearn and Miss Eelin would not be coming near the big house now——" He stopped suddenly; and then he said in an evasive manner: "When they are driving out from Invergarva to put flowers on the gravestone, mebbe there is not much time to get back to catch the evening steamer. And I am not thinking they are very well acquent with his lordship."

"And when you were sent adrift this morning—as

my son tells me—had you no idea of turning to the Bean-an-Tighearn for assistance of one kind or another?"

"While I have my two hands left to me," said Angus, with quiet dignity, "it is not me that would be troubling the Bean-an-Tighearn for anything; she has plenty of others to look after."

At this point luncheon was brought in; and the servant-lass was bidden to set another place at table. But they could not persuade the old fisherman to sit down with them; he said he would go into the kitchen and get a bite; and he would be waiting outside for the gentlemen, if they were so kind as to think of taking him with them to the town of Invernish. When he had gone, the tall teacher said, proudly——

"You see, Lad, I'm not quite forgotten in my native glen, even apart from the emigration business. And when we've finished luncheon, we'll just stroll down to the river-side, and wander along for awhile, to find out if my memory serves. And if we were to get as far as Kinvaig House, I might chance to see his lordship: I'm sure it was only a bit of temper his dismissing the old gillie that has been water-bailiff for so many years."

"Surely you're not going to beg that he should be taken back!" the son said, indignantly.

"Oh, well, no—no. He'll be better with you, if you have undertaken to look after him: he'll discover he has got into safe hands: We'll merely take a stroll along the strath, as far as Kinvaig House——"

But at this point Somerled Macdonald broke out, in desperation—

"Father, you're not going anywhere near Kinvaig House; and I'll tell you why. I have been concealing

the truth from you; and it's better you should know it. You did hear music as we came by—the strumming of a banjo at least; and there was a crowd of men and women on the lawn at Kinvaig, dancing, and shrieking, and kicking their heels in the air—most of them drunk, I should say, from the number of bottles on the table. And this very inn is the headquarters of a lot of prize-fighters; and at this moment they're out at the front, bawling, blaspheming, and drinking, and gambling; and they're maintained here by his lordship that they may amuse the ladies and gentlemen at the lodge. Pah, the whole place reeks with abominations—a sink of iniquity; and if you want to have the Glengarva of your youth restored, why, you'll just have to buy the strath from end to end, and flood it down with carbolic acid, and clear out this mangy riff-raff, and bring back a few decent Highland folk, either from Invernish or from Ontario——"

"What's this you're saying, Laddie? Are ye out of your senses?" the old man cried in bewilderment.

So there had to be a more minute and detailed description; but the refrain was ever the same—

"Buy back the glen, father—and sweep out that scum!"

"Na, na, lad," said the other, more quietly. "That's a scheme that springs quickly enough to a young brain like yours. It's nothing to you—you, the great pioneer—the great railroad king——to think of drafting a population here or there; but such enterprises are not for me at my years——"

"And who founded Kinvaig in Ontario?" demanded his son.

"That was awhile ago—awhile ago," he answered, absently. And then he said: "Well, Somerled, if this is the state of things in Glengarva, we'd better quit. Let's go away back at once. Ring and send word to have the horses put to."

So they prepared to leave, but they were not to be allowed to depart in peace. When they got outside, they found the landau awaiting them, and Angus Macdonald on the box beside the driver; and they were about to cross the intervening few yards to enter the carriage, when one of the bullet-headed bystanders called out—

"You, there, Conky, give the blooming giant a drink!"

The person called Conky, who had possessed himself of a bottle and glass for his own private use, at once interposed between the blind man and the door of the landau.

"Here y'are, sir!" and he thrust forward a half-filled glass.

"No, thanks—no, thanks!" said Somerled Macdonald, impatient and frowning, as he tried to guide his father into the carriage.

But the crop-haired fool would not budge; so there was nothing for it but to push him aside—gently but firmly to push him aside. And in an instant peace had become war.

"Who are you a-shovin' of, you — — — —? You a gemman—you? I'll give you half-a-minute to take off your coat—half-a-minute, neither more nor less, you — — — —." And with that he dashed the bottle and

glass on to the gravel, and came striding forward, not even allowing the thirty seconds of proffered truce.

Now here was the problem to be solved. Given A, a perfectly pacific person, ignorant of fisticuffs, and B, a professional bruiser, bent on furious fight: how is A to escape from the situation with any measure of safety! The solution is simple, if A have sufficient nerve. All he has to do is suddenly, with his left hand, to snatch off his hat or cap, and bring it violently down on B's face—and the man is not of women born who can avoid flinging up both arms to guard himself against such an amazing attack; at the same moment A drives his right fist into whatever portion of B's carcase is nearest him; and the next second B is prone in the roadway, a doubled-up and ámorphous heap. It is not, perhaps, an altogether sportsmanlike manœuvre; but in certain circumstances it is distinctly legitimate; and it is undoubtedly effective. On this occasion what happened happened all in the twinkling of an eye; and the broken-nosed bully went swinging into the gutter, where he lay with his elbows interclasped, like a monkey embracing a cocoa-nut. The strange thing was that his chums made no effort to take his part. Nay, they jeered and scoffed at him. "Served him right, the — —! Why didn't he let the gemman alone? Come out o' there, Conky, or the horses'll be on the top o' you!"

"Somerled," said old Allan Macdonald, as they drove away, "what was all that about?"

"Oh, nothing, father, nothing," was the reply.

"I thought I heard a man go down with a crash."

"Oh, well"—and here Somerled Macdonald did smile a little—"perhaps he's thinking now he has got

toothache—but it isn't in the place where toothache is usually felt."

CHAPTER III.

"SO YOUNG, MY LORD, AND TRUE."

"I AM good, I am beautiful, and I am modest," said Wild Eelin, entering the room; "but it is a cruel and a wicked world, and I am not appreciated." She took the big, black, green-eyed tom-cat from her shoulder, and threw it on to a couch. "Beelzebub, if you have no further news for me from the place below, I have no further use for you—shoo!—away, impostor!" And then she turned to her mother, who was reading a newspaper. "Mother, I am going into the town: do you want anything sent out?"

She was a young girl of about nineteen or twenty, hardly over middle height, of slim and graceful figure, and of unmistakably Highland aspect—Highland in the clear whiteness of her skin, that had rather over than under its due of rose-leaf tint in the cheeks, but above all Highland in her large, liquid, lustrous, deep-blue eyes that, set about with their dark eyelashes, were of a quite indescribable loveliness—they seemed to suggest somehow the wild and strange beauty of a moonlight night at sea. Perhaps her straight nose and full and finely-cut mouth might have lent something imperative and commanding to her appearance; but she was not quite tall enough for that; besides she was young—younger even than her years; and then again her general expression seemed to say of her that her heart was wholly rippling over with laughter, and frolicsomeness, and the

abundant delight of living. With three or four inches added to her stature, and with a dozen years added to her age, she might have posed as a sibyl: as things were —well, she was just Wild Eelin, as her companions often called her, though her Gaelic-speaking friends had a finer name for her than that: to them she was "Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave." For the rest, she was dressed with extreme simplicity and neatness—her blouse being of the Macdonald tartan; and the circular silver brooch she wore at her neck was not set with any precious stones; it merely had these three words engraved on it, 'The Eagle's Crag'—which is the slogan of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig.

Her mother glanced upward from the paper. She was a slight, silver-haired, sweet-voiced lady, who mayhap looked all the more fragile and delicate, and timid in contrast with the robuster colour and brave demeanour of her daughter.

"Really, Eelin," she said, in almost piteous tones, "I must protest——"

"What is it now, mother!"

"I have just been reading the last of those White Cockade articles. Really—really, Eelin, you don't seem to know the lengths you're going. Why, you are openly making love to this young man!"

"He is not a young man, mother," she responded, with much placidity. "He is a phantom—a ghost—a wandering voice! I have not even seen him in dreams; I meet him only in the columns of the Invernish *Observer,* published every Saturday, price one penny."

"You don't appear to understand!" remonstrated the anxious mother. "Behind all this farrago of moonlight

walks, and pretended correspondence, and assignations, there is an actual person; and you have no means of knowing who or what that person may be."

"An actual person!—a common and ordinary person! —why, mother, he's not a person at all—he's a poet! And you want me to stop giving him that little bit of encouragement and approval for which every poet pines! How can you be so cruel! And another thing, look at the consequences of suppressing a poet? Have you ever thought of the awful consequences of suppressing a poet! He might burst!"

"I daresay he knows perfectly well who you are, if you don't know who he is," continued the mother; "and sooner or later there will be an introduction, brought about by somebody—there is always that possibility; and then what will you have to say?"

For answer the young lady walked up to a large scroll framed and hung on the wall—a genealogical tree, with its wide-spreading branches dotted all over with white circular spots like so many sixpenny-bits; and, with her forefinger pointing, she began at the base of the stem, proceeding gradually upwards, and proudly naming one name after another.

"Somerled, Thane of Argyle: married the daughter of the King of the Isles—Reginald, King of the Isles—Donald, Lord of the Isles, 1214—Angus, Lord of the Isles—Alexander, Lord of the Isles—Angus, Lord of the Isles—Angus Og, Lord of the Isles—John, Lord of the Isles—Ranald of Dunluce—Æneas Gorm Macdonald of Kinvaig—Donald Macdonald of Kinvaig—Alasdair Glas Macdonald of Kinvaig—Lewis Macdonald of Kinvaig—Somerled Macdonald of Kinvaig—Ranald John Mac-

donald of Kinvaig—and more—and more; and all of them kin and sib to Linlochmoidatt, and Keppoch, and Glencoe, and Glengarry; and you ask me, their descendant, to be afraid of meeting face to face some young divinity student—some lawyer's clerk—some town-councillor's son—whatever or whoever he may be! You forget, mother. If I am not 'the daughter of a hundred Earls,' I am the daughter of a thousand Thanes; and by the Red Book of Clanranald I fear no mortal man!" She dropped her heroics. "Mummie, darling, the fact is, you are a hen with only one chick, and you keep cluck-clucking when there's no danger about at all. I don't see the slightest chance of my ever meeting this young gentleman who writes the pretty verses. They'll keep my secret safe enough at the *Observer* office. And even if I were to meet him some day, what would happen? I have a small grain of common sense. I'm not nearly such a fool as I look. So you get rid of all that unnecessary alarm, my dear sweet, excellent mother; and tell me what you want ordered in Invernish, for I've a lot of things to do before dinner-time."

And thus it was that a little while thereafter Miss Eelin Macdonald of Kinvaig (alas! there now remained to them nothing of Kinvaig save the style and title accorded them in courtesy by friends and neighbours) was marching briskly along the banks of the wide and full-flowing river, on this still and peaceful and golden August afternoon. She crossed the vibrating suspension bridge; she continued her way by the side of the stream; then she climbed the steep Castle hill, and had a casual look round at the distant mountain ranges, from the ethereal Mealfourvonie in the south to the darker Ben

Wyvis in the north; and finally she went on and into the town, to execute her mother's commissions. But when these had all been got through, she found herself (as she had planned) with a little time of her own; and so, to begin with, she went into a small grocer's shop.

"A pound of tea, Mrs. Fordyce, and two pounds of sugar; and as quick as you can, please, for I'm rather in a hurry."

The big, buxom, good-natured-looking woman behind the counter seemed more inclined to pause and have a chat with Miss Eelin than to despatch her business; and so she had again to be urged.

"And how much will that come to?"

"One and eightpence, if ye please, Miss Eelin."

The girl took out her purse, and searched all through it.

"Dear me," she said, "how stupid! I have only got one-and-sixpence-halfpenny with me. You'll just have to take out some of the tea, Mrs. Fordyce."

"I'm sure you'll not be wanting to affront me, Miss Eelin," said the big, soft-featured woman, who appeared to be of a sensitive temperament. "When you know that anything in the shop is at your service—and no question of money at all!"

"Well, well, Mrs. Fordyce," said the young lady, blithely, "if you carry on your shop on sentimental principles of that kind, I wonder how long you'll have a roof over your head. But I'll owe you the three-halfpence—I won't ask you to open the packet—for I want to get along at once to old Granny Sinclair."

"Ay, I thought it was something of that kind," said

Mrs. Fordyce, with a smile. "And you'll just owe me the three-halfpence until I ask you for it, Miss Eelin."

Miss Eelin now left the shop, went quickly along to another thoroughfare, passed up a narrow entry, ascended a stair, and knocked at a door and opened it. Apparently she knew her way well, for the next minute found her in a small and rather dusky room, the sole occupant of which was a shrivelled little old woman who lay huddled up in a dilapidated rocking-chair. The window at which she sate looked out upon a courtyard above the high wall of which some rowan-trees and poplars showed—their sunlit foliage almost motionless against the flecked blue and white of the sky; but she was not regarding these; she had been helplessly staring at her brown and bony fingers, clasped in her lap, until the arrival of this visitor had suddenly aroused her attention.

"Well, Granny," said the newcomer, in her buoyant and matter-of-fact fashion, "has there been no one looking in for a moment to cheer you up, on this fine afternoon?"

"I've just been wearyin' for ye, Miss Eelin," said the old woman, in a quavering voice, "and wonderin' hour by hour whether ye would come. It's a long, long day, now that they're keeping Jean so late: sometimes it's near ten o'clock before she gets home."

"Well, I'm going to make you a cup of tea now," continued Miss Eelin, briskly, "and we'll pull your chair back a bit, and open the window, to freshen the air, you know; and I see your cushion is all slouched down —you must let me help you over to the bed until I get

things put straight: and if there's any fire in the kitchen, we'll soon have some hot water——"

And thereupon she set busily to work; and that with a wise motherliness, and dexterity, and tact beyond all praise. If in outward seeming she was even younger than her years, in her judgment, her sagacity, her patient tolerance of weakness or stupidity, her good-humoured dealing with fractious tempers, she was a grown woman of quite exceptional gifts and qualities. Perhaps, indeed, her very youthfulness—or that appearance of fresh and light-hearted youthfulness—stood her in good stead. People who otherwise might have been inclined to stand on their rights and dignities (which are jealously guarded among certain sections of the poorer classes) became more amenable when it was only a mischief-loving, whimsical, domineering slim slip of a girl who was determined on having her own way. In her home and out of it this domineering had come to be a recognised kind of thing; everyone, or nearly everyone, submitted to it: who was going to take Miss Eelin too seriously, and run all the unimagined risks of offending her and quarrelling with her? But sometimes the timid and apprehensive mother thought of the future—and of a future that might be near.

And on this occasion the intruder forthwith took upon herself the entire control of the little dwelling and its solitary occupant too; she got the hot water and made the tea; she laid the cloth; she went to the cupboard and brought out what remained of a cold leg of mutton (that small joint had made a most desperate hole in Wild Eelin's finances—and all unknown to the Bean-an-Tighearn); she cut one or two thin and neatly-trimmed

slices; she added some lettuce leaves, and sprinkled the same with pepper and salt and vinegar; she drew the old dame's chair close to the table; she pulled the window-blind right to the top, for a more cheerful light; and then she said—

"Now, Granny, there you are. And what shall I read to you while you're having your tea?"

"Jean was leaving me a paper there, but I'm feart the print is getting to be too little for my old eyes——"

"This one, is it? Oh, the *Observer*. And what would you like to hear about first—the Births, Deaths, and Marriages, I suppose——"

"Maybe," said old Granny Sinclair, "maybe there's something more about that young lass—her that was wearing the white rosette——"

"Oh, the White Cockade creature—why, you're not interested in her, surely!——"

"Ay, but she's a smart lass, that one," said the old woman, with a dim sort of smile, for these comfortable things before her had enlivened her spirits somewhat; "ay, she has some spunk, that one; and who was telling her all the old stories—and how was she knowing all about the '45 and the wild men of Glenmoriston——"

Miss Eelin burst out laughing.

"Granny, Granny, have you never guessed? Why, that's me! Don't you know that I'm a great authoress? I write poetry, and prose, and lots of other things; and I'm going to write about you; I'm going to describe you as one of the notable heroines of the nineteenth century, because you take everything that happens with such a brave heart, and you never complain—here have I been in the house nearly half-an-hour, and you've never even

mentioned the pains in your back, whereas anybody else would have been groaning and whining and yaumering. Have you never guessed—not even when you saw your own recollections put into print?"

The old dame had ceased stirring her tea: she looked stupefied.

"You, Miss Eelin?—is it you?—is it you that's her that stands up for Prince Charlie?"

"And what for no? Bring the ghost of Lord President Forbes before me this minute, and you'll hear the talking I'll give him!"

"And—and—was it yourself that was listening for *Iseabal Bheag nan Brecaig?*"*

"Why, Granny, that was one of your own tales! It was you who told me of the Provost's murder, and how little Isabel happened to see the murderers at work, and how she gave information—that led to her own murder; and how her cries are heard to this day when the evenings are still, along the woods there by the river——"

"And was you hearing them, Miss Eelin?" the old woman said, eagerly.

"Well—that is to say—you know—the girl who signs herself 'White Cockade' makes some kind of pretence of having been listening—and of having heard something; but I wouldn't believe too much, Granny, of what's in the papers. I myself never heard *Iseabal Bheag nan Brecaig,* though I've come past the woods many a time in the very stillest of evenings; but then the girl in the *Observer,* perhaps she has more imagination than I have —and more time to spend along the river-side."

These mystifications seemed to puzzle old Granny

* Little Isabel of the Bannocks.

Sinclair; and yet she would keep thinking back to what she had been told of the young lass who in these degenerate days had the courage to wear the White Cockade.

"Maybe," she said, "maybe I am not understanding very well, Miss Eelin. Is it yourself that was walking through the Islands—and there was the young man that would be there to read his books—were you seeing him?"

"Bless me, Granny, you're as bad as my mother!" the young lady cried, in an injured way. "How often must I tell you that there's no real young man—it's only a kind of ghost, you know—and so is the girl of the White Cockade, if it comes to that. It's all nonsense and make-believe. I don't know any young man who haunts the Islands—I don't indeed: the only person I know who is always there is Mr. Jameson the Keeper—Curator I would call him if I were the Town-Council—poor man, he's about out of his mind just now with rheumatism in his shoulder, and I am going along this very evening with a new kind of embrocation to see if that'll do him any good. The idea that I would walk out to the Islands—or anywhere else—to meet any young man——"

"She was seeing him, if they were not speaking," said the old dame, still vaguely thinking back.

"Yes, yes, the White Cockade girl! Don't you understand? The White Cockade girl may have been up at the Islands, and may have seen a young man pacing about under the trees, and reading a book; but that is all nonsense—that is what they call a romance, and it really doesn't exist. Come, Granny, you must put all these fancies out of your head—though I'm afraid I am

responsible for putting them into your head; and you must take me to be just me, and nobody else; and you mustn't imagine I would go out to the Islands expecting to find any young man strolling about, whether he was a poet or only a common person. I should think not indeed! And here we've been chatting and chatting, and I haven't even read you the Births, Deaths, and Marriages yet—so let's get to work!"

But this gossip about the young lady of the White Cockade had occupied much of her available time; and when she had finished the slow reading of the newspaper announcements—slow, so that Mrs. Sinclair might recognise any familiar name—she found that she must hurry off home or be late for dinner. So she removed the tea-things; she brought the big-type Bible, which was the old Highland-woman's easiest reading, and placed it on the table, along with her spectacles; she shook up the cushion, and generally put things to rights; and then, with many farewell admonitions, grave and gay, she took her departure, leaving behind her in the solitary little room a prevailing atmosphere of thankfulness and satisfaction and content.

When she got home, she found she had only a few minutes in which to dress for dinner, but in this brief interval she managed to supplement her costume with a novel form of decoration. This was an oval plaque cast in lead, some three and a half inches by two and a half, and bearing the following legend in bold relief:

PARISH
OF
HUNTLY
No. 6.

It was, in fact, one of the badges granted in former days by certain parishes in Scotland to superannuated and deserving persons, licensing them to beg within prescribed boundaries. Miss Eelin slipped a bit of blue ribbon through the hole at the top; she fastened the ribbon round her neck, so that the beggar's warrant was suspended in front; and then she made haste down into the dining-room, into which her mother had already preceded her. There were only the two of them at table; it was not often they had visitors.

And at first the gentle, and placid, and smooth-voiced Bean-an-Tighearn did not notice; but presently her eye happened to light on that ominous intimation and mute prayer. She knew what the dark medal meant.

"Really, Eelin," she said, in accents of hurt remonstrance, "I don't know what to make of you! Already —and this only the eighth of the month! What do you do with your pocket-money? I never see you buying the knick-knacks that other girls get for themselves; and yet your purse is always empty. I don't understand it, except that you are incurably careless and extravagant."

The culprit said not a word; doubtless she thought that silence was her best policy. And, indeed, when the elder lady had made a sufficient show of annoyance and reproach, she took out her purse, and selected a sovereign, and pushed it along the table-cloth. That was the signal for Eelin of the wave-blue eyes. In a second she had jumped to her feet, the leaden medallion was thrown aside, and the next moment her arms were round her mother's neck.

"Dearest Mummie, you're just goodness itself! And I know that money slips through my fingers: I don't be-

lieve it's made of silver, or gold, or copper at all; I believe it's made of the gossamer stuff you see on the hedges on the autumn mornings. But this time—this time there will be a difference! Sixpence by sixpence—sixpence by sixpence: you will be fairly amazed at the lasting powers of this sovereign! And thank-you, dear little mother, again and again!"

So that matter was happily settled. But there were other adventures lying in wait for Wild Eelin, before she had got through with this evening.

CHAPTER IV.

IN TWILIGHT LAND.

For she had promised to carry along to Mr. Jameson, the Keeper of the Islands, some sort of liniment of strange and startling efficacy; and she impatiently waited for dinner to be over to be allowed to go. And of course the ever-timorous mother would have her take one of the maids with her; and of course this Daughter of a thousand Thanes, who had an excellent opinion of her capacity to look after herself, would have none of such feeble escort.

"For the sake of appearances, Eelin," said the gentle mother.

"Appearances?" she retorted, proudly. "I wonder who is to be judge of the conduct of anyone going out from this house! Mother, mother," the girl went on, "sometimes it almost makes me laugh—but just as often I am nearer crying with vexation—to see the way you submit to the airs and pretensions of the snobocracy of this town! You—you—with your cultivation, and your

knowledge of foreign cities, and your friendship with famous people—you, to listen meekly to these provincial nobodies, and have never a word of protest when they presume upon you with their bourgeois prejudices, their empty opinions, and their parochial ideas of precedence and importance and showing off. 'The dear Princesses!' I don't believe anyone of them ever saw a Princess, except perhaps on a steamboat on the Caledonian Canal! And you! mother—you—when they are inflating themselves before you—why don't you quietly say to them, 'I saw something of the Princesses when I was Maid of Honour to the Queen; but of course they were much younger then; only they don't forget old friends;' and why don't you take them up to the wall of your own drawing-room, and point to this water-colour and that water-colour, with their inscriptions, and again you could say, 'You see they don't forget old friends—'"

"Eelin," said the mother, half-laughing (but yet secretly inclined to be just a little bit pleased over the fierce indignation of her champion), "if I were to do anything of that kind, what would it be but self-assertion, and what is self-assertion but the safest and surest mark of the parvenu all over the world?"

"Oh, but, Mummie, you do allow yourself to be jumped on so completely——"

"They might not find themselves so successful if they tried the operation on you, Eelin," the elder woman said, with a smile.

At this the sea-blue black-lashed eyes were opened wide.

"What are you talking about, mother? Me? But I am nobody! I am nobody and nothing. I am like

themselves. I am stupid, and ignorant, and provincial, like themselves; they can jump upon me if they choose. But it is you—it is you, mother—when I see their presumption towards you—their thick-headed misunderstanding of your refinement, and your shy ways, and the gracious qualities that just make all the world of a difference between you and them—then my blood boils; and sooner or later——"

"Yes—sooner or later?" said the Bean-an-Tighearn, now laughing outright.

"Sooner or later—when I see them imposing upon you with their affectations, and gentilities, and professions of acquaintance with the fashionable world—well, I will give them a word or two of enlightenment. Yes, I will. I will say to them, 'Do you know who my mother is?—do you know who you're talking to?'"

"The grammar, Eelin!"

"The grammar's good enough for them; it's the kind they're used to," she replied, disdainfully. "Although I suppose there isn't one of them who wouldn't pretend to be able to correct your reading of Dante—yes, and give you a few hints about Spanish assonances—or be kind enough to tell you what was the proper way of addressing Her Majesty——"

"And now, my dear Whirlwind," said the slight, silver-haired, gentle-mannered lady, rising from her place, "now that you have finished your tirade against the highly respectable society of Invernish—not that you know anything whatever about the people, for you won't go near them—"

"I would go near them soon enough if they would treat you with proper consideration!" the girl exclaimed.

"They are very good, kind, generous people—generous to a fault, for they keep sending you invitation after invitation, and you always make some excuse, and I have to go and leave cards for you. But now that your tirade is finished, I suppose you have conclusively proved that you needn't take Agnes with you on your walk up to the Islands. Very well. Only you'd better be off at once. And don't stop talking to Mr. Jameson. And get home well before dusk." And thus it was that when Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave sallied forth from the house, she was alone; and this time she took her way up the river instead of down, making for the Islands that lie in mid-stream. But 'it wasna to meet Duneira's men'—no, nor yet any poet or provost's son. For she was an independent lass, was this one; and held her head right high.

It was about eight o'clock, and the sun had set some twenty minutes before; but in these latitudes there is an abundance of daylight at that hour, in the early part of August. All along the west, over the wooded hills, there reigned a golden afterglow, fair, and peaceful, and serene, that had hardly anywhere a suggestion of cloud; but overhead in the pellucid blue-grey there were a few saffron-tinted flakes, changeless and motionless, their soft and steady fire seeming to say that they could see things unknown to the denizens of this nether world—that they were looking out to the wild conflagration going on among the Coolin peaks, and by the shores of Canna, and Uist, and Barra, and across the flaming waters of the Atlantic to the splendours of the horizon-line. Here, indeed—all around her, as she went on between the open fields and the rowans and alders

bordering the river—everything was quiet and tranquil, and inclined to become mystically pale. The glow from the west reflected on the broad bosom of the stream was of a soberer tone; and on the oily surface of the smoothly-swinging current there were myriads of rapid, tremulous threads and streaks and touches of shadow, where the swift-changing ripples caught the opalescent blue of the zenith. The trees, too, seemed to be darkening somewhat; one could imagine a trace of spectral mist through and behind the heavy masses of foliage. It was daylight, but not day; there was something added—a something indefinite, illusory; in the all-pervading hush and drawing on of the closing hours might not the cries of Little Isabel of the Bannocks come plaintively over from yonder heights?

Well, it was not of Little Isabel of the Bannocks, nor yet of any golden-haired poet who might haunt these solitudes, that Eelin Macdonald was thinking as she left the hither side of the stream, and crossed one small suspension bridge after another, and followed the winding paths under the lofty trees and through the tangled brushwood of each successive island; it was rather of the superlative merits of the embrocation she carried with her in her pocket; and when at length she had reached the Keeper's cottage, and when she had accomplished her mission—in the brisk, common-sense, good-humoured manner she could assume when she chose—then it was, and not till then, that she began to look a little at her surroundings and consider what she should do next. The Islands are very attractive, no doubt; and the Invernishians are properly proud of such an ingenious combination of public park and natural

wilderness, of clear brown swirls and eddies under the overhanging hazels and alders, and open and foaming white cataracts where artificial barriers divert the broad rush of the river. But then she had just come round from that direction; and there might be a little variety in going along the other bank, and crossing by the big suspension bridge further down; moreover, there would be ample time for her to get home before dusk; and so, finally, without thought of harm—without definite intention of any kind—she held on her solitary way.

And for her, indeed, it promised to be a sufficiently solitary way. For though she was now facing towards the town, and had in sight about a mile of both banks of the Nish, with the town itself closing in the vista—the towers of the Cathedral, the bridges across the wide water, the scattered houses and gardens, and dominating the whole the lofty Castle-hill with its baronial walls and parapets—and notwithstanding that the peaceful hour might have been expected to tempt the good folk out from their homes—there were remarkably few people to be seen—only a single figure, or a single couple, here or there in the distance. She recalled that afterwards. It was a rather picturesque scene before her, but it was almost an untenanted one. And this was how the miracle of transformation came to be wrought.

She was passing behind some trees and bushes—about the last of them on this bank—when she suddenly heard one small boy call to another—

"Here, Jock, Jock!—he's got a fesh!"

She could not see the small boys; but (unless one of them was a liar) she knew what had happened; so she instantly pushed her way through the hazel branches

and the still more perplexing briars, until she could look out and down upon the broad river. She had anticipated correctly. Some way out, and well over his waist in the water was an elderly man, who, with a flat cap and tassel, might have been taken for a Georgian schoolboy, or, with a diver's helmet, would have looked as if he had just come up from the bottom, so bulgy and capacious were the indiarubber waders that he wore up to his armpits; and the top of his salmon-rod was steadily bent (no curve of beauty invented by any artist of old was ever half so beautiful as that curve); while he himself was struggling to back out of the heavy current, and yet not daring to detach his attention from the line.

"Hold on to him, Fergus!" cried Wild Eelin, jeeringly; for she plainly recognised his predicament.

He must have known her voice, he and Miss Eelin being old and familiar friends; but he paid no heed to her; he did not even turn his head when he had successfully made his way ashore and warsled up on the grass. He had enough to occupy him. Most likely he had been fishing this pool for several days, hour after hour, morning and evening, without getting a single rise to his fly; and now that he had induced one of the coy creatures to accept a Dunkeld, or a Silver Doctor, or a Durham Ranger, he was not going to waste any of his thought on a laughing-eyed, saucy minx who had come along to look over his shoulder, as it were. Especially at the beginning of the fight, when all was as yet uncertainty.

Now it is to be observed that at the opening of these proceedings there were only four spectators—that

is to say, the fisherman Fergus Dunn, the daughter of the House of Kinvaig, and two nameless and bare-footed laddies. And the town was a mile away; and it was past eight o'clock; and the surrounding country had appeared deserted. And yet very soon Miss Eelin, who could not help tarrying to witness this silent duel between Fergus and the fish, became vaguely conscious that several people had congregated around her—behind her on the grassy bank and up on the gravelled pathway; and every yard or two that the salmon retreated down the river, this unknown concourse, mysteriously augmenting itself every moment, also moved forward. At first she gave the scattered crowd no heed, because it was mostly invisible to her, and all her attention was concentrated on the point where the line touched the water; but presently this ever-increasing assemblage had extended up and down until it seemed to encompass the fisherman and his young companion. Whence and whither had these people come, then, on this still, voiceless, vacant evening? Had they sprung out of the bowels of the earth?

There was a boil on the surface of the current: *Boom!* went a murmur of excitement through the mass of spectators. And yet truly this was but a poor-spirited fish; it would not show any kind of fight; it merely sulked at the bottom from time to time, and then again it would fall down with the stream, making it a matter of calculation as to how long it would take to reach the sea.

"A sluggish one, that, Fergus," said the girl, who was following him step by step.

"Beggars maunna be choosers, Miss Eelin," re-

sponded her friend; salmon of any kind being prized in these waters.

And meanwhile the small multitude, that had doubtless been perceived from the Castle-hill, had grown with incredible rapidity to a great multitude—old men and young, lasses and lads, message-boys, grave townsfolk, strangers in tourist attire: why, even the nurses at the Infirmary opposite had come flying across the garden to peer through the railings at the unwonted turmoil. All along the banks and out on to the suspension bridge these eager swarms of folk clustered, with eyes glowering through the gathering dusk at the oily breadth of river; it was a nervous crowd, expectant, quick to answer and warn and assert among its composite members; while even the dogs had become quite excited by the general ferment, and were careering hither and thither, yelping and barking. Then every newcomer—every unit added to the dense accumulation—had to be informed; and had plenty of informants.

"It's only a sea-trout!" said one, contemptuously. He was a fool.

"It's a twenty-pounder—I saw him myself when he jumped out of the watter!" another maintained, thinking to gain importance. He was a liar.

"There's no half enough strain on the line!" said a third. He was a critic—and a fool and a liar all combined.

"Teach your grandmother! There's not a better fisherman than Fergus Dunn in the whole of Invernishshire!"

"Keep out o' the way there, you laddies!"

"Haud back—haud back! Gie the man a chance!"

"I'm sayin', will naebody ca' in they d——d dogs!" This outburst of righteous indignation was addressed to the crowd at large, by an irate old carter who appeared to have gone half out of his mind with sympathetic anxiety.

"Ah—ah! Look—look! There—there—there!"—a thousand exclamations broke forth simultaneously when twice the sluggish salmon rolled over and showed itself on the surface; and then there was an all-absorbing scrutiny to see that the line still held.

It was the strangest spectacle—none stranger of its kind could be found anywhere else in the Queen's dominions: the wan twilight gradually coming over the castled hill, and the town, and the hanging woods, but leaving the wide stream of a curious metallic hue; the dark assemblage, slow-moving and murmuring; the nucleus of this nebulous gathering a little elderly man who was being steadily drawn down to the sea by a stubborn fish, his companion a young girl who was either carried on, step by step, by the keenness of her interest in the struggle, or who was too proud to acknowledge the existence of this great concourse surrounding her. Then came the thrilling moment of the bridge; and when old Fergus was seen to descend into the water again, to follow the fish underneath, there were further exclamations.

"The man'll drown himself!"

"He canna hold back against that wecht o' watter!"

"He'll be into a hole!"

"Ach away! He kens every stone on the bottom as well's he kens the High-street!"

"He canna follow—it's no possible!"

Indeed it seemed a perilous exploit; for the river was high; and here the confined current charged furiously through; but Fergus, cautiously groping with foot after foot, made on and on, until the mass of spectators over his head had to rush from one side of the bridge to the other. And still the tackle held; and still the obdurate salmon, trusting solely to the weight of the stream, and not tiring itself by any dramatic flourishes, kept retreating and retreating; and still the mystical twilight deepened all around, until here and there, through the gardens of the adjacent villas, the golden star of some newly-lit lamp trembled and gleamed.

As for Wild Eelin, forgetful of time, place, and circumstances, the overpowering fascination of the pursuit held her captive; and old Fergus, who had returned to the bank after getting underneath the bridge, addressed to her a word now and again, as if assuming she would not desert him, but see out this adventure to the end. Besides, there was an indescribable glamour, witchery, diablerie about the scene all around her, now that the darkness was closing down; the sombre, half-silent assemblage seemed a phantasmal kind of thing; the spectral light on the water appeared to come from no earthly source.

Of a sudden there was a low cry from the crowd; the fish had shown itself again—even through that ashen glare on the surface of the current.

"The white feather at last!"

"Dod, he'd better take care: Fergus Dunn's efter 'm!"

"The dour deevil—he'll be off yet!"

And again he showed—this time sailing somewhat nearer the bank. Fergus took a firm stand, reeling up

tight. By this time they were all of them down in the suburbs of Invernish, and servants at attic windows and their mistresses at front doors were straining their eyes out into the dusk, wondering at the tumult. At length, and unexpectedly, Fergus turned to his companion.

"Will ye take the rod now, Miss Eelin?"

There was hardly any opportunity for hesitation, and she was a fearless kind of creature: the next second she had got the rod in her left hand, and the fingers of her right hand on the reel; while old Fergus was creeping and crouching down by the water-side, with a formidable steel instrument in his grip. The hum of the people had almost ceased: they seemed to dread lest their talking—their very breathing—might work some mischief. Inch after inch Fergus crawled along; Eelin was putting on all the strain she dared; then there was a gradual giving in and giving in—her fingers busy with the reel as if her very life depended on it: finally came a quick stroke of the gaff, and the next moment the fish, in the fading light, was seen to be safe on the bank. The whole multitude seemed to give one sigh of relief and satisfaction, and the pent-up flood of excited talk broke loose, each man turning to his neighbour with a triumphant look, as if he himself had been through the long contest and come out the happy victor.

And now, for Miss Eelin, arrived the reaction. When she had surrendered the rod, and bade good-night to Fergus, she turned to set out for home, and the crowd courteously made way for her to pass. She went back to the suspension-bridge, which was now almost empty; she crossed over to the other side, and then she sped away like a ghost through the crepuscular gloom. There

was no longer any intoxicating eagerness of interest, no proud disregard of bystanders, no wilful self-reliance. A certain chilliness of reflection had supervened. There was an ominous question occupying her mind and momentarily assuming larger dimensions; and the question was this—What would the shy, gentle-natured, decorous Bean-an-Tighearn think when told that her daughter Eelin had acted as gillie for an old fisherman, in full view of the assembled populace of Invernish, to say nothing of the hotel-tourists from the south? Nay, Eelin herself could now recall (with a burning forehead) that at the very moment she took the rod from old Fergus she distinctly heard one English stranger say to his companion "Why, it's better than a theatre!" She would have liked to kill that man.

Now amongst those who had made way to let her go through the crowd was a rather good-looking young fellow—tall, fair-haired, with refined features, and somewhat timid grey eyes—who seemed considerably struck by her appearance. He was daring enough—in the dim half-darkness no one could notice him—to let his regard follow her while she remained in sight. And then he turned to his neighbour—who was waiting to see the ten-pounder tied head and tail.

"Do you know who that young lady was?" he ventured to ask.

The lad—who looked like a tradesman's messenger, and doubtless was acquainted with everybody—stared at his confession of ignorance.

"That?" said he. "That was Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig!"

CHAPTER V.

A CAGED LINNET.

NEXT morning this same young man, Archibald Gilchrist by name, was up and out of bed by four o'clock; he was at that time of life when a youth of eager temperament and restless if vague ambition grudges every hour lost in sleep. When he had dressed in his tiny room he opened a trap-door and let himself down to the parlour below: these two apartments were all that pertained to a small, thatched toy-cottage standing in a little bit of garden in the northern outskirts of the town. His breakfast, consisting of a tumbler of milk and a farle of oatcake, stood on the table; but then his breakfast-hour was nine; and meanwhile, as with him prudence and forethought were not so much a virtue as a necessity, he carefully broke off not more than a couple of inches of the oatcake and allowed himself about a tablespoonful of the milk. Then he put a Latin grammar in one pocket, and a Latin dictionary in another, and, with a thin volume of Horace's Odes in his hand, he donned his cap and went out.

He had the wide, silent, solitary world wholly to himself; not a living creature was astir. When he followed along the river-side and passed the main thoroughfare leading into the town, the grey streets were empty and voiceless; and when he continued on his way through the southern suburbs into the country, not a dog barked, not even a bird chirped in the hedges. And yet the day was not so far distant. In the eastern heavens the heavy swathes of rose-purple cloud, lying

motionless in seas of gold and silver, spoke of the coming of the dawn; the wooded hills were slowly declaring themselves in their hues of deep olive-green; and the broad river had now become a deep pearly grey, with quivering and swift-recurring streaks of shadow on its luminous surface. Here was the very spot where, on the previous night, the concourse of people had crowded round the old fisherman; yonder was the suspension-bridge over which the girl with the strange, dark-blue, black-lashed eyes had vanished into the dusk. Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig? It was a proud name. It seemed at once to take her away into an unapproachable region, forbidden even to the caprices of a wandering fancy.

Nor was there much room for any such idle fancy amid the stress and storm of this young man's life, its straitened means and circumstances, its immediate and imperative demands. As yet his future was all a chaos before him; but it was a chaos that kept calling to him; and his answer was a sort of perfervid confusion of unsystematised energy, apparently without any definite and practical aim. These blind impulses towards incessant self-improvement, towards the acquisition of all possible knowledge: whither did they lead? Here he was hammering away at Horace; but it was with no thought of becoming a schoolmaster. His rare holidays he devoted to geologising among the hills; but it was with no hope of winning the Wollaston Medal or of sharing the proceeds of the Murchison Fund. He had taught himself at least the elementary principles of navigation; but it was with no intention of competing for the post of master mariner. Weltering in the quagmire of German meta-

physics: what contribution to the *res angusta domi* could be got out of that? No doubt his patient and loving study of English literature, especially of English and Scotch poetry, and his ceaseless searching after purity of style, may have helped him a little in his own poor contributions to the Invernish *Observer;* but for these casual essays in prose and verse he was not paid, nor did they promise to lead to anything substantive. And in the meantime, amid all this perplexity of occupations and pressing on towards some unknown goal, his actual and ostensible employment was that of cashier and bookkeeper to Mr. John Struthers, draper and general outfitter, Union-street—a taskmaster who exercised a perfectly devilish ingenuity in the torturing of his subordinates.

The new day opened over hill and field and stream; an occasional distant sound told of awakening life; and a number of guillemots, that had come circling and sailing in from the Beauly Firth, were now splashing and dipping in the shallow backwaters, or preening their wings on a long promontery of pink-hued gravel. By this time he had reached the Islands, and had seated himself on a bench there; behind him a wilderness of underwood, overhead the spreading branches of elm and lime and sycamore, in front of him the wide current swinging and racing on its way to the sea. And he was getting on fairly well with Lib. I. Carm. XXV., and his little pencilled annotations and conjectural renderings. The first few verses he had picked out with longs and shorts, and Epichoriambic Trimeter Catalectic he had pronounced them in the margin. Then came *Me tuo longas pereunte noctes,* with a caret between *tuo* and

longas, and (*amante*) written at the side. Then came "O, are ye sleeping, Lydia?" which may be regarded as a somewhat liberal interpretation of *Lydia, dormis?* And then again, "You, an old woman—lightly-clad?—or lightly-esteemed?—will weep for—": thus he toiled on, hunting out the hidden verbs, and piecing the phrases together until he had got something like an intelligible whole. Of course he used no cribs; it was not to please or pacify any examiner that he had undertaken this work; it was because the hunger of acquisition that governed him had decreed it to be necessary he should read Horace in the original. But why?—towards what end? He could not have answered the question—except, perhaps, by the confession that there was a poor old widow, living up Dingwall way, who expected great things of her only son, and that Latin, as one of many weapons, might turn out to be of use to him in the warfare of life to which he was (not timorously) looking forward.

The day widened and became more and more resplendent; the guillemots, having finished their morning bath, had flown away in quest of breakfast; old Fergus had come along to fish the Islands Pool (the happy mortal, whose labour was all in the open air and all a pastime!); and now the tall, flaxen-haired, absent-eyed student shut up his books, and turned his face towards the town. It was half-past six, and about time for him to enter into slavery.

First of all he had to go to Mr. Struthers's house for the keys; then he went to Union-street and opened the back premises to give ingress, at seven o'clock, to the workmen, who descended into what they called the

glory-hole; then an old woman appeared, to sweep up; and then he betook himself to his desk—which was in a partitioned-off corner dimly lit by a semi-opaque window—there to tackle books and accounts. It was a depressing task; for these were all hopelessly in arrear; and no wonder, seeing that he had the duties of four people thrust upon his shoulders; nevertheless he struggled along, though every now and again some sudden and radiant flash of colour would strike through this grey twilight—some vivid recollection of rambles on the slopes of Scuir Vuillin or by the winding shores of the Dornoch Firth. At eight o'clock the young men arrived, to take down the shutters and get ready for the day's work; and soon thereafter came the girl-assistants, to dress the windows and make other preparations, on their side of the shop. Nine o'clock brought him a brief respite, for then he hurried away home for breakfast; but most of this interval was devoted to practising with Indian clubs and dumb-bells, so that he had barely time to swallow the milk and oatcake before setting out again. And at ten o'clock, back in Union-street, the dreary servitude was resumed, though now with a new feature added.

For in this establishment a clever piece of mechanism had been rigged up by which, when a sale had been effected at either of the counters, and the bill and the money placed in a little tin box, the box could be run along a pair of tiny rails until it finally descended upon the cashier's desk, who then receipted the bill and returned it by the same means. So that when a certain flaxen-haired dreamer was patiently if hopelessly trying to attack the arrears of day-book and ledger—or perchance surrepititiously wrestling with the intricacies of "Ad

Laelium Lamiam"—or perchance (for a lad's fancies, despite of storm and stress, will sometimes flame and burn with poetic fire) recalling the rose-leaf curve of a young girl's profile, or the strange, unnerving, unintentional glance of a pair of long-lashed eyes—then a sudden Kr-r-r-r-r would startle him out of his reverie, and he would be called upon to deal, promptly and accurately, with some such problem as this—

Served by 4.		*Examined by E.T.*		
Boy's Hose		£0	2	8
Necktie		0	1	6
	10*s.*		4	2

Whereupon he would have to test the half-sovereign; stamp the bill; count out the 5*s.* 10*d.* change; and by the time the tin box was on its return journey, what had become of his vision of a magical summer evening and of a rosebud maiden in her teens? And here was the little, acrid, red-headed Struthers, storming, scolding, and insulting everyone all round, as soon as the place was clear of customers; but the moment that another one appeared at the door, then he was all sycophantic blandness, with a deferential smile, a bent back, and hand washing hand in invisible water. And thus the dismal, interminable, inexorable hours went on; and the wild heart of imprisoned youth beat against its barriers in vain.

But as it turned out this day was to be a day of days; into the dreary, mechanical, soul-sickening round there leapt a sudden wonder. When at two o'clock he hastened off homeward for the scrimp meal that served him in lieu of dinner, he found lying on the table an envelope, the handwriting on which he instantly re-

cognised; it was handwriting always of the fullest import to him—it was that of the sub-editor of the Invernish *Observer*. This was the message:—

"DEAR SIR,

"There are a good many geological terms in your paper of this week. If you would care to glance over a proof, you might look in any time in the course of the evening. And then I should also have the pleasure of making your acquaintance.

"Yours faithfully,

"THOMAS GRIEVE."

Why, it was like a recruit's call to arms! He had never been within the mysterious precincts of a newspaper office; he had never met face-to-face this all-powerful person, who could confer prominence or obscurity, who could advise and amend, and even reject at will; he had never even beheld, much less been asked to tackle, that entrancingly interesting thing, a proof. Hitherto he had been a mere outsider, timidly and rather shamefacedly dropping his contributions into the letter-box, and sneaking off in anxious uncertainty as to their fate. But that he should be invited to come inside, and take his place, in however humble a fashion, among the small band of folk who had made the Invernish *Observer* the chief literary paper of the north of Scotland, that seemed to be opening a new world for him altogether, a world with quite limitless possibilities. All that afternoon it is to be feared that day-book and ledger received but perfunctory attention; and that the accursed *Kr-r-r-r-r* of the tin box broke in upon many a far-reaching fantasy.

The moment that eight o'clock gave him final release from the long and monotonous labours of the day he betook himself to the *Observer* office, a somewhat dingy little building in a side-lane leading down to the river. He was very nervous. Twice or thrice he walked up and down the pavement, passing and re-passing the door, without finding the courage to enter; and when at last he did go in, and when a small boy undertook to show him Mr. Grieve's room, he followed in a blind and half-bewildered kind of fashion. He only knew that there were sombre stairs; and a strange, all-pervading odour —which in after days, when he knew it to be the odour of printers' ink, grew to have a mystic enchantment for him; and a hollow rumbling of machinery, which spoke of some portion of the paper already going to press. And then, and unexpectedly, he found himself in a square, low-roofed, rudely-furnished apartment, that was all littered with newspapers, and magazines, and books of reference; while before him, and welcoming him with a sort of bluff good-nature, was a middle-aged heavily-built, bilious-complexioned man whose beady black eyes scanned the new-comer in no unfriendly way.

"Sit, down, and I'll send for your proof," said the sub-editor. "But let's have a better look at ye, man!" He stepped back a pace, and surveyed Gilchrist from head to foot. "Ay, you're well set up for hill work. Are these stories you tell about your tramps in the mountains 'bona feedy,' or just wi' a little bit spice of romance in them?"

"They're as true as I can make them," Gilchrist answered, rather apprehensively. "But—but hill distances have often to be guessed—and then—I get very

few holidays, and I have to crowd as much as I can into each one of them. I hope you don't think——"

"Oh, it's all right—it's all right," said the other; and then he turned to a speaking tube, and whistled down it, and called for a proof of the article on 'The Parallel Roads of Glen Roy.' In a minute or two Archie Gilchrist was seated at the table, a long, damp slip of paper in front of him, and a pen in his not too steady fingers, while he was trying to bring his excited brain to work on sentence after sentence, and that with a trembling consciousness of not knowing how to mark the errors when he should come to them. Fortunately for him, there did not happen to be a single blunder in the whole of the column—which of itself may be taken as conclusive evidence that the age of miracles is not yet past.

When the blameless proof had been returned, Tom Grieve looked at his watch.

"I've got a quarter of an hour," he said. "What say ye to stepping up the road to Peter Macindo's for a smoke and a crack?"

"Here were more marvels! Gilchrist could hardly believe that he was asked to go hob-nobbing with the man who was practically editor of the famous literary organ of the north (for the editor and proprietor, Dr. Gillespie, did not interfere very much); but of course he gladly and eagerly assented; whereupon they passed out and through the dusk; and made their way to an old-fashioned, gas-lit tavern; and secured a little, odd, solitary box of a place where, after the briefest delay, Grieve had a large tumbler of frothing stout on the table before him, while Archie Gilchrist—who was neither

smoker nor drinker, but nevertheless had to join in with the spirit of so great an occasion—contented himself with a modest glass of ale.

"So you're in Struthers's place in Union-street," said Grieve, as he lit his pipe. "Seven in the morning till eight in the evening? Desperate hours—just murderous. Where do you get time for all those various pursuits of yours?"

"I'm generally up at four—and seldom in bed before twelve," was the simple answer: he was not in the habit of whining over his condition in life.

"And all day occupied with your clerk-work. Prosaic surroundings—"

"Yes, indeed," interposed Gilchrist, with something of an ingenuous blush appearing in his pale features. "I suppose you'll be saying I should stick to my last."

"Nothing of the sort," rejoined this bilious-hued man, who seemed a kindly and considerate person, notwithstanding the occasional sarcastic twinkle in his small black eyes. "Certainly not. What would Scottish literature be but for the tribe of singers who have sung in the most untoward circumstances? Allan Ramsay was a barber—Fergusson, a lawyer's clerk—Burns, a ploughman—Hogg, a shepherd—Alexander Wilson, a travelling packman—Allan Cunningham, a stone-mason—poor, ill-fated Tannahill, a weaver. There's no doubt that making up accounts in a draper's shop hardly sounds poetical—maybe it's not a congenial employment; but you've had predecessors, my lad; Robert Gilfillan—and are there any verses that get nearer to the heart of the Scotch peasantry than 'O why left I my hame'?—Gilfillan was shopman to a grocer in Dunfermline. And

then if it's encouragement ye want, remember you're living a dual life; you're connected with the newspaper world; and there has always been plenty of poetry about the Scotch newspaper offices. John Mayne—and 'Logan Braes' might well have been written by Burns—Mayne was a compositor; Richard Gall was another—in the *Edinburgh Courant;* Alexander Rodger was the sub-editor of the *Reformer's Gazette;* and William Motherwell—poor Motherwell—only thirty-eight—but he could not have bettered 'Jeanie Morrison' if he had lived to be a hundred—Motherwell was editor of the *Glasgow Courier.* And why should I not add in our own Doctor?" he continued between the meditative pulls at his pipe. "The Doctor's well fitted to take his stand in that goodly company; though perhaps I say it who shouldn't; for most of his pieces have appeared from time to time in the *Invernish Observer:* and it's ill work praising one's own household. But this was what I was driving at: don't you get imagining that there is anything incompatible between your daily work and your literary enterprises. Not at all. The mind of a man is free, whatever mechanical task his hand may be at. And the doors of Westminster Abbey won't ask whether you were ever behind a counter or not."

He took a long draught of the stout; and resumed in a very different key.

"Well," said he, with a sardonic grin, "this week at least there's nothing in your paper that 'White Cockade' is likely to be after you for; she lets you have full swing when you keep to your geological theories. But she can give you a rare good skelp when she wants——"

"And when it is deserved, I daresay," Gilchrist put in, with a bit of a laugh.

"It's well for you you can address her from behind the columns of a newspaper," the sub-editor went on, with a certain significance. "I'm thinking, if you were to meet her real self, you would not be quite so bold in your advances——"

"I hope," said Gilchrist, quickly and anxiously, "that there's no risk of misunderstanding. The assumption is that these two people who answer each other in the *Observer* are quite imaginary."

"That's as it may be," responded Grieve, without committing himself. "There are a good many personal opinions—prejudices, I should say—dragged in. And you two seem to be in antagonism on every possible point. When you fire off at her

> "There's nae Renwick now, lassie,
> There's nae gude Cargill,
> Nor holy Sabbath preaching
> Upon the Martyrs' Hill."

then she waps back at you with

> "Fill a glass to the heroes whose swords kept us free,
> Right descendants of Wallace, Montrose, and Dundee!"

And she's smart—she's smart. You generally come off second-best in these skirmishes, when you provoke her with your whiggery—the fierce young Jacobite that she is! She's too clever for you, Gilchrist, and that's the fact. Even when she's in the wrong she gets the better of you through her devil-may-carishness, her audacity, her jeering and jesting."

"Might one be allowed," said Gilchrist, with some diffidence, "to ask who she is—her real name?"

"It is allowed to ask; it is not allowed to answer," replied the sub-editor, promptly. "That is one of the fundamental statutes of the office. Though if she were to demand to know who you were, it might be difficult to refuse her: she's an imperious young lady."

He glanced at his watch.

"Time's up. By the way," he said, as they proceeded to quit this snug howf on their return to the *Observer* lane, "have you any idea as to what your screed of next week is to be about?"

"Not quite yet," was the answer, "but I thought of introducing somehow a sketch of a very striking scene I saw yesterday evening—the capture of a salmon in the Islands Pool—or rather below the suspension-bridge—with the whole town of Invernish looking on. Very singular and very picturesque, especially towards the end, for the chief actor was a young lady—a Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig—"

"Who?" said the sub-editor, suddenly.

"A Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig, I was told," Gilchrist proceeded, in a wholly unconcerned fashion. "I presume she belongs to the Kinvaig Macdonalds of Glengarva. A very distinguished-looking girl—very—extremely so; but what struck me most, I think, was her mastery of the situation, her air of quiet self-possession, a kind of proud indifference to the presence of the crowd. I suppose there would be no harm in my bringing her into my sketch——"

"What?" exclaimed the sub-editor, inadvertently, and for a second he turned to "glower" in amazement at his companion, here in the dusky thoroughfare.

"Oh, but naming no names, of course," said Gilchrist,

hastily. "I would do it with discretion, I hope. Only —the figure of the girl—alone—with the great crowd behind her—it was all so picturesque—"

"Yes," said the sub-editor, at the door of the office, "and if that is your subject for next week, send in the article in good time, for I think I may have to keep an eye on the proof. Good-night!"

They shook hands and parted; and now, already, as Archie Gilchrist went away home through the transparent dark, his brain was busy coining phrases for his next week's contribution. He thought it might interest the Invernish folk. He would hold up a mirror in front of that nebulous, black, murmuring multitude swarming along the river-bank, and show them what they looked like. And surely a guarded reference to the young lady could not be taken amiss? She was the heroine of the whole affair: it would lose three-fourths of its interest if she were left out. Of course, he dared not say much; for she appeared to be well-known in the town; and the occasion would be recognised. He reflected that some of those rustic poets whom Grieve had been talking about would have been less scrupulous; they lived in days when rhymesters had a freer hand; they would at once have made the bold avowal that they had gone "a waefu' gate yestreen," and got their death

> "frae twa sweet een,
> Twa lovely een o' bonnie blue."

But the modern young lady does not care for compliments of the kind; nor does she wish to have it hinted to her, in the columns of a weekly paper, that here or there in the nameless crowd surrounding her she may possess an undeclared and bashful lover.

CHAPTER VI.

"THE GLEN'S MINE!"

WHEN old Allan Macdonald and his son Somerled were ushered into the drawing-room of the dwelling, just outside Invernish, that had for sentiment's sake been named Glengarva, the maidservant informed them that her mistress was out cutting some flowers but would be with them presently. Whereupon the younger man, placing a touch of guidance on his father's elbow, said—

"Here is a chair for you, father."

But the white-bearded blind giant remained erect.

"In this house," he said, "I cannot be seated until I am bidden to be seated by the Bean-an-Tighearn herself."

His son laughed.

"You are giving your chieftainess the attributes of royalty," he said.

"In my regard she has these, and more," the older man answered. "Ay, and her daughter too. Indeed, I should not be surprised if it is the daughter—the daughter of our chief—that most of them will be asking about when we go out west again. And you have eyes, lad; use them; carry your report; there's many a one will thank you; and if you get a chance you must tell her—for I am not good at saying such things—you must tell her—well, I do not know how to put it—but tell her—tell the young lady—that the hearts of the people over there grow warm within them—warm with loyalty

and affection—when they think of the daughter of their chief—ay, the daughter of their chief—tell her that, laddie. She little knows—she cannot know—she is a young thing—how those people regard her—how eager they will be to hear of her. You must tell her, Somerled —you must tell her."

He seemed nervous and excited; there was even a tremor in his voice. And then he said impatiently—

"Well, what about the house? A fine house—a noble house, I hope."

"Oh, no, it isn't anything of the kind," his son replied. "Quite an ordinary kind of house. But the surroundings are beautiful—a beautiful garden—in this room there's an embrasure, with three windows, all open—and they look out on the flower-plots and the tennis-lawn, and you get a glimpse of the river too, through the lime-trees. There's a splendid araucaria. And a fine acacia, too—though the blossom's gone. The flower-plots are simply a blaze of colour in the sunlight; there are yellow calceolarias, and scarlet geraniums, and orange-red nasturtiums, and black pansies—well, nearly black—you might call them black—and crimson snapdragon, and then above them all are the tall spikes of gladiolus like spears of flame. Yes, and round each plot a border of blue lobelia. Everything very bright and brilliant, because it is so bright and brilliant a morning, you know; and the glimpses of the river are like silver through the green branches of the limes. Very quiet and still—you might be hundreds of miles away from a town——"

He was startled into silence. For of a sudden there stole into the tranquil air the tinkling chords of a harp —hushed and muffled, like the falling of drops of water

into a fountain, and yet strangely near; and strangely near also—just outside the open windows apparently—was the sound of a girl's singing, every syllable of which they could hear distinctly:

O fair shines the sun upon Huntly's green shaw;
And the mavis and the merlie are singing;
And blithe is the bride as she steps through the ha',
And a' the kirk bells they are ringing.
An' ye'll tak the high road, an' I'll tak the laigh,
An' I'll be in Scotland before ye;
But me and my true love will never meet again
By the bonnie, bonnie banks o' Loch Lomond!

Thus she sang; and doubtless it was the fancy that she was entirely alone and unheard that led the singer to give an excess and abandonment of pathos to her notes:

O Willie, Love Willie, it is dark by the shore,
Through the mirk the white moon-clouds are flying;
Far out by Kilbranda the black waves roar,
And I hear the wild kelpie crying.
O ye'll tak the high road, an' I'll tak the laigh,
An' I'll be in Scotland before ye;
But me and my true love will never meet again
By the bonnie, bonnie banks o' Loch Lomond!

And again she sang—in the all-pervading silence—

A kiss, but ae kiss frae the bonnie, bonnie bride,
Ay, a kiss for me that's broken-hearted;
And never a word, Love Willie, ne'er a word
O' the night that you and me parted.
An' ye'll tak the high road, an' I'll tak the laigh,
An' I'll be in Scotland before ye;
But me and my true love will never meet again
By the bonnie, bonnie banks o' Loch Lomond!

Now there are some tones in a woman's voice that (perhaps heard only once in a lifetime) go straight to a man's innermost soul, and work strange doings there: they are a cry to him—a cry and a summons to the very depths of his being—a cry to which his whole nature must passionately respond. What could Eelin Macdonald—out there in the summer-house—in her little bower of honeysuckle and white roses—and fingering away at her harp—what could she know of the message that the still air was carrying? Perhaps the tragic piteousness of her voice was only a girlish amusement—an occupation—an exercise even. But it altered the whole course of a strong man's life.

Presently the Bean-an-Tighearn came into the room, with many apologies, in her sweet-spoken way, for having kept her visitors waiting; and now it was that the older Macdonald tried to make the speech that he had carefully prepared. But he was considerably agitated; and did not get on very well.

"Madam," said he, "I hope you will understand that we are sensible of the high honour you have conferred on us this day. The kindness of your letter overwhelmed me. When I was a young lad in Glengarva—how could I have looked forward—to being received by you—and—and——"

"But who should be more welcome in this house," said the gentle-voiced lady, "than you and your son? The Macdonalds of Kinvaig are not a heartless race; they have some sense of gratitude; and they know what you have done for the strath. Indeed, I wish my daughter had been at home—she has plenty of talk—

she could have told you what we all of us owe you—but I'm afraid she has gone into the town——"

"There was someone singing in the garden a minute ago," said Somerled Macdonald (his heart still thrilling and answering, as it were, to the strange message). "I made so bold as to guess——"

"In the garden?" said the Bean-an-Tighearn. "Oh, then, that must be Eelin!" She went to the open window. "Eelin!" she called. "Eelin, are you there? Eelin!"

In about a couple of minutes the drawing-room door was again opened, and there entered a young girl—a deep indigo Tam o' Shanter on her bunched black hair—who appeared taller than she really was, by reason of her frank gait and a certain boyish audacity of look. "Who are you?" the dark blue eyes asked fearlessly enough; and the set of her head was proud; and it might almost be said that there was a kind of challenge in her manner. That first attitude of hers did not last very long. For no sooner did she come to perceive, in the course of conversation, the extreme and exaggerated deference that the two strangers paid to her mother than she instantly changed towards them, and nothing could exceed her kindness, and sweetness, and courtesy. To the older man especially she was particularly attentive; and yet in an outspoken, laughing way that seemed to have for him a singular interest and charm. He reached out his trembling fingers, and sought her hand, and held it for a moment or two.

"I am told you are a very beautiful young lady," he said, "though I can never hope to see you. Ay, there's many a Macdonald in Ontario has your portrait—every

household of them, I should think; for when her ladyship was so kind as to send out your photograph—well, they were not to be restrained; they just took it from me and would not give it back till there were copies and enlargements made, and now in every house the Daughter of the Chief has the place of honour—who else, indeed? Ay, and that is what I hear all of them say; and about the Highland character of your features; only—well, you must forgive me—and her ladyship will forgive the liberty—only, I am almost wishing that you had been a boy—"

"Oh, but I'm with you there!" she exclaimed, with reckless candour. "Of course I wish I had been born a boy! Shouldn't I have held my head up—yes, and turned out my toes—and every step would have said 'The Glen's Mine!'"

"That you never could have said, Eelin," the mother put in, smiling, "whether you were boy or girl."

It was well that none of them chanced to be looking at Somerled Macdonald: he had grown pale, even to the lips.

"Ah, but, by God, she may say it yet," he was whispering to himself; for he had been sore wounded by the beauty of this maiden, and her brave ways, and the pathetic cry in her voice when she was singing in the summer-house; so that there was a kind of delirium in his brain.

And perhaps he did not quite know what happened to him thereafter during this interview; for he was busy with a far-reaching project; and when at length he and his father found themselves out in the open again—on their way to the Islands—he neglected his usual habit

of describing, for the benefit of the blind man, such objects as they might be passing. At last they came to a well, of which old Allan Macdonald had recollection, because of the famous sweetness of the water; and here he stopped to have a drink; and now it was that the younger of the two disclosed his thoughts.

"Look here, father," said he, abruptly—and there was a sort of glow of passionate enterprise in the usually quiet and thoughtful features, "What's the use of one's life unless one can do something fine with it? Well, you had your chance—you founded the Canadian Kinvaig. Why shouldn't I have my chance? All that I want left to me is the use of my fists and my head on my shoulders: I can fend for myself. But I have a considerable fortune, as you know: why shouldn't I do something fine with it? The ordinary course of human life is a humdrum, tawdry kind of thing. When I get my chance, why shouldn't I do something worth while with the money I happen to have?"

"What on earth are you talking about, Lad?" his father said, in the midst of these rapid utterances.

"Well, if it's possible—if it's possible, and if I have enough, I am thinking of buying the Glengarva strath, or as much of it as may be necessary, and handing it over to the daughter of your chieftainess, so that the Macdonalds of Kinvaig may come to their own again."

"Bless me, man, are you off your head!" the father cried, standing stock still. "What's happened to you? Has she bewitched you? There's many a one has told me she was a splendid-looking creature: but surely she has not produced a midsummer madness? Oh, I recognise that it is a grand idea; but it's madness; mid-

summer madness! What glamour has she put over ye? —what witchcraft?"

"And wouldn't you like to see the Bean-an-Tighearn established in the old house?" the son demanded. "And the glen swept clean of all that scum? And if I wanted a few thousands to complete the purchase, I know the very man I should apply to—and that's yourself!"

"It's madness, Somerled," the father repeated, but with less force of conviction; perhaps there was something captivating about this wild scheme; and blind eyes can see visions. "Even if Sir Charles Orme would part with the place; and if those Mountmahon people would give up their tenancy; and if you were content to surrender everything you've got, and start life again as a poor man—why, how do you know she would accept her share in the arrangement? For of course I'm talking of the girl. And this seems a mad way, a frantic way, of trying to win her favour!"

"And do you imagine, father," said the son, in his brief, explicit habit of speech, "that if I were able to buy back Kinvaig, and hand it over to the daughter of the race, she would ever learn from whom it came? No, I think that is not likely! There would have to be some other way. I have no thought of winning her favour; no, nor even expecting a word of thanks. I know my place; I understand hers. And if it is a madness to make a sacrifice on the altar of clanship, I fancy you should be able to guess who brought me up in that faith."

"Somerled Macdonald," said the old man, "do not you attempt to deceive me. There was no sentimental

dream of this kind in your head when you sailed from Quebec. Nor was there yesterday. It was this morning that did it; and it was this girl who did it—no religion of clanship or anything of the kind. And yet it is a grand idea—the Macdonalds of Kinvaig in their old home! A splendid idea!—why, man, if there was a public subscription, out there amongst the Macdonalds in the west, it would go like wildfire. But—but—there's sense in what you say: when the one person has the opportunity to do something fine: only, you see, Lad, if I am responsible for bringing you up with these romantic traditions of loyalty, you must let me stand in. Ah, but you must! Could I sleep in my bed, if I missed such a chance? And yet I have not been bedazzled out of my wits by the bright eyes of that lass. God help us all, to think I shall never see her! But I heard her, Lad; I heard her laughing, and the delightfulness of her way of talk. The old family back again in Glengarva! That's it, is it? Well, I'm in with you; I can have but a few years left to me now; and at night I shall rest all the better for thinking and thinking that we have done a good thing. Ah, and about telling them—I am not so sure—I am not so sure I could forego that. When it is all settled I would like to be there; and get a shake of the young lady's hand: and the Bean-an-Tighearn might say 'Thank-you!'—in the sweetest voice that God ever gave to a woman."

"You may tell them it was all your doing," Somerled Macdonald said. "I do not wish to win any favour."

"All my doing? Am I a thief, then, to steal another man's credit from him?" he made answer. And again he went on, in a sort of stupor of rapt contemplation:

"The old family of Kinvaig back in Glengarva!—by the Eagle's Crag, that is something to stir the blood!—ay, and to stir the blood of many a one across the seas!"

By this time they had resumed their stroll—passing over the small suspension-bridges and following the winding paths through the Islands. Of a sudden old Allan Macdonald again stopped short.

"Somerled," said he, "are you trying to make a fool of me, at my age? Why, man, the whole idea is not practical or possible!—it doesn't come into the nature of things—it's a dream—splendid enough—grand enough—the Kinvaig family back in their old home!—ay, ay, splendid enough—but not feasible—not feasible. Are we men, or are we two great big babies—infants crying for the moon? You that are called the railway king—at the height of a great career—to think of your beginning your life all over again—giving everything you possess to a girl—even though she is the daughter of the House of Kinvaig—and even though you drank in loyalty and devotion to that House with your mother's milk—it's a splendid dream, as I say, but it's not within the limits of common sense——"

"And yet it might happen," said Somerled Macdonald, absently. And as they went on again, his resolute and refined features had grown pensive and even wistful: perhaps he was thinking back—thinking back to the thrill of a girl's voice, and to the straightforward, honest, good-comrade stare of a pair of bewildering deep-blue eyes.

And meanwhile what of Wild Eelin herself? Well, she had fetched her hat and gloves into the drawing-room, and had thrown aside the blue Tam o' Shanter

that had partially imprisoned the thick masses of her raven-black hair: this was a signal that she was going into the town.

"Mother," she said, as she stood on tiptoe at the mirror, "those two Canadians are gentlemen."

"They are of Highland blood, Eelin," responded the elder woman, quietly.

"And we ought to show them every civility while they are in Invernish. Maxwell must make up a basket of fruit and flowers, and I will carry it myself to the old gentleman, at his hotel. As for the young one, he did not bestow much notice on me: but his manner to you, mother—perhaps you did not notice it yourself—but his manner to you—oh, I could have taken his hand and kissed it to show my gratitude! That it is to be a gentleman, no matter how or where you were born! And of course we must ask them to dinner; only it won't be much entertainment for two men of the world—who have travelled so much and seen so much—it won't be much entertainment for them to come and dine with a couple of silly women——"

"Speak for yourself, you wretch!" retorted the Bean-an-Tighearn, with a show of spirit.

And now the hat and veil had all been properly pinned and fixed.

"'O Eelin fair, beyond compare,'" the young lady said, addressing herself in the mirror. "That's me, mother. They took to celebrating me in the old ballads, hundreds of years ago. If you want to know all about me——"

"You'll tell me yourself, I suppose, Eelin," said the mother.

"There's one thing I will tell you: as soon as I come back from the town, I will write out the invitation to Mr. Macdonald and his son—for any evening you like to fix—and you'll see what pretty things I will say to them both. Oh, yes, I can, when I choose. You'll see, this time!" and away she went, with her frank, boyish stride—down the gravelled walk, along the banks of the river, across the suspension-bridge, up the Castle hill, and into Castle street. And here she disappeared.

For in this thoroughfare there was an old curiosity shop, the owner of which, an exceedingly good-natured gentleman, allowed Miss Eelin to ransack his stores at will; so that especially on wet days she would spend hour after hour poring over and examining books, medals, coins, engravings, armour, furniture, pottery and porcelain, and the like; and in this way she had acquired a good deal of desultory knowledge. But on this occasion her quest was of a more definite character. She marched to the counter and said indignantly:

"Mr. Edel, have you seen this morning's *Observer?*"

The portly antiquarian beamed benevolently upon her from over his spectacles.

"Yes, I have, Miss Eelin."

"And did you read the article on the Parallel Roads of Glen Roy?"

"Yes, I did read that paper——"

"Signed 'Fairfax'!—Fairfax, indeed!—I suppose he likens himself to Cromwell's Fairfax! But what I want to know is," she went on, vehemently, "why he should bring in anything about the Macdonalds of Glencoe? The Macdonalds of Keppoch—that's right enough, for Keppoch is near Glen Roy; but why, into a geological

paper, should he drag the Massacre of Glencoe and declare that William III. was practically guiltless of it? Oh, it's too bad! He's a Whig, Mr. Edel, a common, cringing, toadying Whig; and I'm going to give him what for. Yes, I am. Only, you must supply me with chapter and verse. Of course everyone knows that King William consented to the Massacre—but I must have definite authority—"

"Miss Eelin," said the antiquarian, smiling, "why will you not let that young newspaper lad alone? I have just been hearing something about him. A most worthy youth, I'm told—clever—industrious—ambitious—he will make his mark. Archibald Gilchrist, that's his name—"

"I don't care who or what he is," said the intrepid young Jacobite. "I'm going to give him something he'll remember for trying to gloss over the most shameful crime in history. So you just tell me where I'm to look, Mr. Edel, and I'll hunt for myself; I don't wish to bother you—"

She was rather a pet of his; so without a word he went away to the bookshelves, and after a few minutes returned with a little brown pamphlet.

"I think this will about serve your turn, Miss Eelin," said he. "Listen: 'The Massacre of Glenco, Being a True Narrative of the Barbarous Murther of the Glencomen, in the Highlands of Scotland, by way of Military Execution, on the 13th of February, 1692. Containing the Commission under the Great Seal of Scotland for making an Enquiry into that Horrid Murther: the Proceedings of the Parliament of Scotland upon it: the Report of the Commissioners upon the Enquiry, laid before

the King and Parliament: and the Address of the Parliament to King William for Justice upon the Murderers.'" He turned to the concluding page. "Listen again," said he: "'You know that there never was any prosecution against any of those persons charged with this barbarous murder, but that, on the contrary, by the advice of some who were then about his Majesty, several of the officers were preferred, and the whole matter slurred over; so that the crying guilt of this blood must lie upon them, and not upon the nation, since the Parliament could do no more in it, without occasioning greater bloodshed than they complain of. You know likewise, that by the influence of the same persons, this report was suppressed in King William's time, though His Majesty's honour required that it should have been published.'"

"Yes, but—" she said doubtfully.

"Ah, you mean the actual responsibility?" He turned back a few pages. "Hear this: 'After these instructions, there were additional ones given by his Majesty to Sir Thomas Livingstone, upon the 16th of the said month of January, supersigned and countersigned by his Majesty, and the date marked by Secretary Stair's hand, which bear orders "for giving of passes, and for receiving the submission of certain of the rebels," wherein all to be noticed to the present purpose is "That therein his Majesty doth judge it much better, that these who took not the benefit of the indemnity in due time, should be obliged to render upon mercy, they still taking the oath of allegiance," and then it is added, if "Mackean of Glenco and that tribe can be well separated from the rest, it will be a proper vindication of the public justice to extirpate that sect of thieves."' That is from the

Commissioners' Report—subscribed at Halyrud-House, the 20th day of June, 1693."

"Is that little book very expensive, Mr. Edel?" said she, timidly (for she was keeping herself on strict allowance, after the affair of the sovereign).

"It's yours, Miss Eelin—it's yours," was the generous reply; and he thrust over the pamphlet towards her hand.

"No, no," said she, drawing back. "I must not—you are always too good to me. But if I borrow it? Will you lend it to me for this afternoon?"

A few minutes afterwards she was off on her way home again—with not much abatement of her swinging gait; and very proud she was, and vindictive, and yet inclined to laugh at herself for her savage impetuosity; and these were the lines that were galloping through her mischievous brain:—

"O what's the rhyme to porringer?
  Ken ye the rhyme to porringer?
King James the Seventh had ae dochter,
And he gae her to an Oranger.
  Ken ye how he requited him?
  Ken ye how he requited him?
The lad has into England come,
  And ta'en the crown in spite o' him.

  The dog, he sanna keep it lang,
  To flinch we'll make him fain again:
We'll hing him hie upon a tree,
  And James shall hae his ain again.
  Ken ye the rhyme to grasshopper?
  Ken ye the rhyme to grasshopper?
A hempen rein, and a horse o' tree,
  A psalm-book and a presbyter."

And then again she said—for she was fond of talk-

ing to herself—when the weather was fine and the air exhilarating—

"But as soon as I've settled the hash of this fellow —Gilchrist?—Gilchrist, was it?—there will be something pleasanter to do: I must write to the Canadian father and son who were so extremely polite and deferential to my mother. And whatever is very pretty and sweet and nice in the English language they shall have it; and supposing I can't find quite the right phrases in English, then I will send them a few kindly words in the Gaelic; and, if I know anything of those two, that will just gar their heart-strings crack."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEVIL'S KIRN.

Now Wild Eelin was with two or three of her companions, and she was boasting desperately.

"Anyone can swim in the sea!" she declared. "For the salt water holds you up. It's very different in a river, especially where there's a strong current. That tries whether you are a swimmer or not. Very well: this is what I'll do with you: I'll bet you five shillings that at daybreak to-morrow morning, before there's anyone about, I'll swim from the Devil's Kirn* to the foot of the weir at the Keeper's Cottage. There now: is it a wager?"

"You'll drown yourself, Eelin!" cried one of the girls.

"That's my look-out," was the answer.

* Kirn—churn.

"You'll disturb the pools before old Fergus has been over them," said a second. She was the daughter of the owner of the fishing-rights at this part of the stream, and she was a sensible lass.

"Old Fergus says you can't disturb these pools," she replied again, "for it's only passing fish you get."

"Well, I will bet you five shillings," said the third.

"Oh, but that's not the way to accept a bet," said Eelin, impatiently. "When a bet is offered you, you say 'I take you,' or 'I'm on,' or 'Done with you.'"

"Put it how you like," rejoined the other, "but there's my five shillings against yours that you can't swim from the Devil's Kirn up to the weir."

"Right you are," was the definite response which concluded the bargain.

And thus it was that about half-past four on the following morning these young persons, having stolen from their several homes, had surreptitiously assembled at the gate of Glengarva House; and Eelin had brought with her two large bath towels. There was no gay boasting now; no laughing over this mad enterprise; whatever had to be spoken was spoken in a subdued whisper; and it was on tiptoe that they crept past the front garden, and glanced warily at the blinded windows. Indeed there was something impressive and even awe-inspiring in the aspect of the silent world around them; for the golden portals of the east were not yet opened; and the strange, grey half-light that spoke of the approaching dawn gave to surrounding objects an unwonted and uncanny look. It was the woods on the hill-side opposite (the woods where the cry of Little Isabel of the Bannocks is heard on the still evenings) that were especially sombre;

and yet the individual trees could be distinguished clearly enough. Indeed the distant Castle hill and the towers of the Cathedral and the other features of the town were visible with an unusual distinctness; for as yet no smoke had risen from the houses; while minute by minute the wan light in the heavens seemed to grow stronger and stronger between the heavy swathes of cloud.

Then when Nausicaa and her attendant maidens had gone some little way along the bank, they left the foot-path, and crossed some beds of shingle towards a clump of rowan-trees and alder-bushes that formed a sort of semicircle facing the river; and here, by the aid of hat-pins, they managed to fix up one of the bath-towels to the branches, so that she could retire within to make her preparations. There was not the least need for any such concealment; for not a living creature was anywhere to be seen; but well she knew that if she were to attempt to change her dress out here in the open she would be conscious of a million million eyes staring at her from every quarter of this empty and voiceless universe. So she passed behind the improvised screen; and remained there a minute or two; and came out again wearing the extremely scant attire of a professional swimmer. And now she was in truth Nausicaa "the white-armed," Nausicaa "gifted with beauty from the gods"; and perhaps it was carelessness rather than vanity that had caused her to dispense with the customary disfigurement of a bathing-cap; but she wore on her feet a pair of scarlet felt slippers, to take her safely over the stones. And still she preserved her undaunted air; it was her companions who had grown apprehensive; for the black water on this dim and ghostly morning had

frightened them; and even now, at the last moment, they one and all sought to dissuade her.

"Eelin," said one of them, with tears in her voice, "dear old girl, don't try it. The bet is of no consequence! I would rather forfeit twenty times the five shillings. Just look—that Devil's Kirn seems a terrible place!"

"Oh, go away!" said this slim, beautifully-made creature, as she took off her red shoes and placed them on the shingle. "Do you think I am afraid of the Kelpie?"

But the next moment she uttered a slight scream—she had put her foot timorously into the water.

"Oh, it's mortal cold!—it's mortal cold!" she said, shivering.

And then boldly she splashed right in—making straight across the shallows, until the racing and swaying stream was swirling and surging round her knees. And ever further and ever deeper; and the darker the water became around her, the whiter she seemed to grow—"Was never salmon yet that shone so fair among the stakes on Dee." Then of a sudden she disappeared, all but her head, into a great black hole of a place—into the Devil's Kirn, in fact—and instantly, as her alarmed companions could descry, she was swept down by the heavy current. But this was only a cunning trick on her part. Although apparently she was losing ground, and that rapidly, she was all the time slanting over to the other side; and it was not until she was well into the deep and comparatively still eddy that she began to put forth her powers. And then they saw that she was gaining—away over there under the hazels and alders;

and on and on she stole with smooth and steady stroke —not very quickly, it is true, but still always making and making, until she got nearly to the top of the Devil's Kirn. Alas! her troubles were all to come. For here the space of eddy ceased; and now she had to face the full force of the river; battling hard (as they could see from the opposite shore) but making scarcely any headway. She was well equipped for this exploit, it is true. She was an expert and practised swimmer; she had unusual physical strength, considering the slimness of her frame; and she had the courage and resolution and tenacity of ten men. But of what avail were these against the deadly weight of this current that came swinging down from the weir? She fought and fought and fought; and sometimes they imagined she was making a little progress, and sometimes they seemed to see her drifting back. It was a gallant struggle; "And even the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer," in other words, the damsel who to all appearances was likely to win her five shillings would very gladly have foregone the prize (or twenty such) to see the brave swimmer safely on shore again. A right gallant struggle; but it could have but one end: a Newfoundland dog would have been swept down by the rush of this impetuous flood. And so, when she had beaten the strength utterly out of her, they perceived her suddenly yield to the stream: she was carried quickly along some fifteen or twenty yards: she managed meanwhile to make partly for the shallows; and presently they saw she had gained a footing, and was wrestling laboriously out, yet hardly able to hold herself against her implacable enemy. And then, when she had got into water not much above her knees, she

stood still, panting, her head hanging down, her arms hanging down, unable from sheer exhaustion to move hand or foot further.

But now something happened that sent a swift fire through her veins, and galvanised her into a new life. Even in her helpless collapse, while she was trying to recover her breath, her eyes had been inadvertently wandering; and to her horror she descried in the distance, coming along the bank, that terrible object—a man!

"Send him away!" she shrieked to her girl-friends. "Send him away!"—and with a wild resumption of vigour she raised her arms and pointed and gesticulated.

But of course they could not hear her, because of the myriad voices of the river; nor could they see anything, for they were down in front of the rowan-trees; but as these frantic gestures of hers were repeated, they emerged from their retreat, and looked anxiously around. Their worst forebodings were confirmed. Here was a young man walking slowly and deliberately towards them —a tall, fair-haired young man who appeared to be poring over a book, while he carried a companion volume in his other hand. For an instant they regarded each other in dismay, not knowing what to do; then the most courageous of them—Lilias Neile by name, though they generally called her Lily Neile—went across the shingle, and up through some more bushes, and boldly marched along the footpath to check the intruder. The poor youth! He had not noticed them, nor apparently had he observed what was going on out in the river: and when, at this lonely hour of the morning, a young lady

suddenly advanced upon him out of the gulfs of the unknown, his startled eyes betrayed their alarm.

"Oh, if you please, sir," said the distressed maiden, "would you walk the other way?—oh, if you wouldn't mind, sir—would you walk the other way, if you please, sir——"

The pale face of the student became very red.

"Oh, yes—oh, of course!" he said, in extreme confusion; and at once he turned and made off—in bewildered ignorance of what awful crime he had committed or had been on the point of committing.

Then Eelin painfully and wearily waded through the shallows, and came ashore, and was received by her companions.

"I have failed," said she; and for a second the dark sea-blue eyes looked as if a very little thing would have made them fill.

"Oh, but you tried splendidly!" said one.

"Yes, indeed!" said Lily Neile. "I never saw such a fight—against the impossible!"

Eelin glanced back, vindictively, at the river.

"But I'll do it yet," she said. "I'll do it yet. Didn't I get up to the top of the Kirn?"

"Yes, you did!"

"Very well. But I took the wrong side—that was all. Next time I'll keep to this side all the way up."

"Eelin, do make haste and get dressed, or you'll catch your death of cold!" one of her friends protested; and so she withdrew behind the screen, and was absent for a brief while.

And now the golden dawn was declaring itself in the east, high over the dusky woods: and the swathes of

purple cloud were assuming a tinge of rose; and here and there in the distant town a thin thread of pale-blue smoke wavered up from a chimney, telling of awakening life. When Eelin reappeared, and when the screen had been removed from the branches, the general call was for hurry; for these delinquents fondly hoped they might even yet be able to sneak into their respective homes as free from observation as when they had come out. But another adventure befell them, before they could make any such attempt. Just as they had got to the gate of Glengarva House, and were whispering good-bye to each other, Lily Neile grasped her friend's arm.

"Look, look!" she said, in an excited undertone. "The little white bird—look, look!—what kind of bird is that?"

Indeed it was an unfamiliar object, this small, yellowish, fluttering thing that winged its unaccustomed flight from branch to branch, or perched on the top of the iron railings. But the mystery was immediately solved by Eelin calling out, in the same subdued tones—

"Oh, it's Dickon!—we lost him last night, and searched everywhere—O the dear, to have come home again!—mother will be so delighted—"

But when she hurried forward, the dear showed no disposition to return home with her; on the contrary he continued his silly and uncertain wavering from twig to twig, along these front gardens, and generally just within the iron rail, while his pursuers were continually being baffled, by a few inches, or a foot, or a yard. And so this ignis fatuus lured them on, until almost unawares they had again come upon the poor hunted student whom they had frightened away from the upper part of

the river. He was now seated on a wooden bench facing the stream, and he was intent on his books; and if he looked up in some surprise when the maidens drew near, it was only for a moment: he took refuge in the printed page again, no doubt expecting them to pass on and leave him in peace.

But it was just at this point that the escaped canary, having arrived at the end of the railings, fluttered on to the top of a stone wall, and fluttered off again into the garden behind, thus vanishing from sight. It was vexatious beyond measure, when success had been so near. The wall, it is true, was not very high; and any one of these damsels might with an effort have managed to clamber over it: but then there was a young man not far off, and they had no assurance that his eyes would always be fixed on his book. On the other hand, he seemed a quiet, respectable, modest youth; and so Eelin Macdonald mustered up sufficient courage to approach him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said she, with great civility, "but my mother's pet canary has just flown over this wall—she sets great value on it—it was a present from Malta—I am so anxious to catch it—but it has flown over this wall—"

The moment she addressed him, he had at once risen to his feet: and he was now timidly regarding her with a singular admixture of curiosity and diffident respect.

"Oh, would you like me to try and get it for you?" he said—but yet shyly, and with some colour come into his face.

"If you wouldn't mind—it would be so kind of you," she said.

He laid his books on the wooden bench; and with just a passing glance at the other young ladies, he crossed the path, got a foothold on the kerbstone of the railing, and his hand on one of the spikes. Student as he appeared to be, the tall, pale-faced young man proved himself something of a gymnast; in a couple of seconds he had thrown himself over the wall, and disappeared.

"Eelin," said Lily Neile, with a queer look in her eyes, "that was the young man I had to warn off when you were in the water. But he didn't see you—I am certain he didn't see you."

"I do hope he will catch Dickon," was the reply. "Mother will be so delighted."

Well, he did—though in coming back over the wall he had to exercise the greatest caution lest he should squeeze the palpitating small creature. And when he had slid down to the ground, and come forward, he had to exercise equal caution in handing over his prize.

"Oh, I am so much obliged to you," said she, earnestly. "And I am sure my mother would like to thank you—if she knew——"

"I am glad to have been of the slightest service to you, Miss Macdonald," said he—at which she started a little. And then he went on, with considerable hesitation and embarrassment: "And—and if you will forgive my speaking to you—I would like to explain that it was only yesterday I heard from Mr. Edel who you were—I mean, that you were the writer of the 'White Cockade' articles—and—and my name is Gilchrist."

At this she seemed even more surprised.

"Then you are 'Fairfax'?" she said, suddenly, and with a curious, scrutinising look, that yet had no unfriendliness in it.

"Well, yes," he answered her, shamefacedly. "And I wish to ask your pardon for anything I may have said that might offend you. I did not know. I am afraid you must have considered me impertinent——"

"Not at all!" said she, with the frankest good-nature shining in the clear blue of her eyes. "Nothing of the kind! It has been a fair give and take between us. I daresay I provoked you many a time; and besides it it was all a make-believe—it was merely fun——"

"I shall be more careful in the future," he said, in a most humble manner; and then he raised his cap, and bowed to her, and turned away to recover his books; while her companions, having come to the end of this episode, now sped away to their several homes, still vaguely hoping that they might escape detection.

Nor was this the last of Archie Gilchrist that Miss Eelin was to see on this same day. Immediately after luncheon she proposed to convey to Mr. Allan Macdonald's hotel the basket of fruit, adorned with a few flowers, that old Maxwell the gardener had prepared; and her mother, having some business in the town, agreed to accompany her. They had no carriage; and they were economical folk who did not care to spend much money on cabs; so they went on foot; and it was on foot that they were turning from Church-street into Union-street when, at the corner, they ran right against the young man who had captured the canary—he was hurrying home for dinner, in fact. The moment he

caught sight of Miss Macdonald, his eyes looked startled and frightened; and he would fain have passed without the least sign of recognition; but she stopped, so as in a manner to intercept him.

"Mother," she said, "I want to introduce to you the gentleman who was so kind as to get back Dickon this morning—Mr. Gilchrist—my mother."

The poor, shy lad—to find himself suddenly face-to-face with the Lady of the House of Kinvaig! He had hardly a word with which to deprecate her prettily-expressed thanks. And then—somehow—with a thumping heart—and with a sound of a strangely sweet voice in his ear—he succeeded in getting away from them. And what was this now that had come over the town of Invernish?—what glamour and glory was it that seemed to shine along the grey stone pavements?—how had the atmosphere become irradiated, as it were? What had suddenly entered into his life, making a wonder and marvel of it? Was he to count hereafter on some faint—even the remotest—recognition of his existence, and perchance, too, of his poor literary efforts, on the part of the peerless young creature with the dazzling, the bewildering, eyes, the frank, swift look, and the proud poise of her head? When Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig happened to pass him in one of these thoroughfares, might he dare to lift a timid glance towards her, and take off his cap? Perhaps she even expected him to do so? Why, all at once the world had grown richer, and more beautiful, and splendid! When he got home, he could hardly believe that his great good fortune was real: he neglected his food, and kept staring out of the

window at the wide river—trying to recall the minutest shades and tones of that momentous encounter.

Meanwhile the Bean-an-Tighearn and her daughter had gone on their way.

"Eileen," said the mother, with an odd expression on her face, "what is that young man?"

"He is a newspaper-writer," replied the daughter—having been led into this mistake by some words of Mr. Edel's. "For one thing, he writes those essays signed 'Fairfax' in the *Observer*."

"Well—don't you think—" and here the gentle-spoken lady hesitated, for she was not in the habit of saying disparaging things of anyone—"don't you think he is just a little—well—uncouth in appearance——"

"He's a genius, mother," said Eelin, in her happy-go-lucky fashion, "and they all wear their hair like that. I hope you are not going to judge of the young man by his dress. Are you vexed that I introduced him?"

"Oh, not at all—not at all."

"For, you see," continued the young lady, "I have a natural sympathy with people of genius, because I am of that kind myself."

She was silent and musing for a second or two, and then she said more seriously—

"You have read some of those 'Fairfax' essays, mother?"

"Well, chiefly to see how far you were being involved in a very compromising correspondence," was the unusually severe reply.

"Oh, that was all nonsense," said the girl. "That side of them is all mockery and persiflage. But apart from these banalities I do really believe that young man

has got a sort of message, if he only was aware of it. I do believe he has got something to say, if he only knew how to say it. And I think he will find out in time."

CHAPTER VIII.

A COMMISSION.

It was a still and golden evening: golden was the wide river that swung easily and oilily along, save where unseen stones fretted the smooth surface with streaks of purest azure; golden were the thunderous masses of cloud piled high in the east, for they were looking across to the burnished west; and golden was the air that stirred, and no more than stirred, in the garden, bringing with it varied perfumes from the resplendent beds of flowers. The two ladies of Glengarva House were walking up and down, under the branches of a row of lime-trees.

"And do you think, mother," said Eelin, "that those two will pay the least heed to your instructions about morning dress?"

"A seven o'clock dinner; and only ourselves: what else?"

"Ah, but I know those two," said Eelin, confidently, "Do you imagine Mr. Macdonald, who has come all the way from Canada chiefly to see you, do you imagine he is likely to wear morning dress when he is invited to dine with her ladyship of Kinvaig?"

"I wish he wouldn't call me 'her ladyship,'" responded the mother, with a touch of impatience. "He is perfectly aware I have no right to any such title. It

may be well enough for some poor crofter body who knows no better——"

"All that he thinks of, mother," the girl contended, "is what will do you most honour, and show his high esteem for you. I wonder he doesn't address you in the third person, as the people of Glengarva do. And I am certain both of them will take no heed of your warning —why, they will regard it as a great occasion!"

"I hope not—I hope not," said the mother. Indeed neither she nor her daughter had prepared themselves, as regards attire at least, for any great occasion. Eelin, as she strolled up and down this grassy bank, under the limes, wore a quite simple costume of pale daffodil-yellow, with a belt of orange silk, into which she had stuck a bunch of deep crimson roses; while her mother was dressed quite as simply in black, though for once in a way she had pinned at her neck a bit of common heather. Now heather is the badge of the Macdonalds; and this was meant as a little compliment to her guests.

They heard a sound of carriage-wheels on the drive; and so they left the cool promenade under the limes, and crossed the tennis-lawn, and passed through the French windows into the drawing-room. Almost simultaneously the door was opened, and Mr. Macdonald and his son made their appearance. Of course they were in evening dress; and Eelin quickly said to herself, while her mother was receiving them—

"Ah, didn't I know! And what an improvement it is, too! Why, the young man would be just terribly handsome if it weren't for the authority and domination of those steadfast eyes of his. That makes one rebel.

Certainly one must rebel. It is inconceivable that one is to be bullied by a Canadian!"

But surely there was nothing imperative or self-asserting in the manner of Somerled Macdonald, who now led his father forward to her; on the contrary, when old Allan Macdonald announced that this would unfortunately have to be a farewell visit on the part of his son, who had been summoned back to Canada that very afternoon, and was leaving the next morning, the younger Macdonald could hardly be got to speak of his affairs or plans in any way whatever; he seemed to think that they were too trifling to engage the attention of this gentle lady and her daughter.

"But I hope it is no bad news that is taking you away so suddenly?" Eelin said to him.

"Well, not exactly," he answered her—and if his tones were grave, they were softly modulated and pleasant to hear. "It is merely a matter of business. But it concerns the interests of a great many people, and I must get over as quickly as I can."

"And does your father go with you?" she asked again.

"No. The old country has cast its fascination over him; and also, if I may say so, the kindness of your mother and yourself. He would like to remain here for a time. The accent of the people in the streets delights him——"

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald!" she protested. "In the streets of Invernish? Why, it's mostly Lowland Scotch they speak —not Highland English at all——"

"He is delighted with it none the less," Somerled went on. "And then, you know, he can recall a little

Gaelic; and it pleases him to go about with Angus Macdonald—do you happen to know Angus Macdonald, who was the water-bailiff at Kinvaig?"

"Angus? Of course! He is a friend of mine," said she—for she had many friends, of all classes.

Then he told her the story of the dismissal.

"But Lord Mountmahon can't dismiss him," said she, promptly, "for Angus is in the service of Sir Charles Orme."

"Sir Charles is not likely to quarrel with a paying tenant," he answered her, "over a matter of that sort. However, I have undertaken to find employment for old Angus, and in the meantime he can remain with my father, and take him about. Angus will be well looked after. My father envies you that you have it always in your power to do a kindness to someone of the Macdonalds of Glengarva——"

"And who has done more than himself?" said she. But at this moment dinner was announced; and so they proceeded into the dining-room.

It was not an elaborate meal; but it was seasoned throughout with the utmost friendliness and goodwill; and Eelin had soon grown accustomed to the grave and direct look of the younger man, who at the same time was so deferentially courteous, especially towards her mother. Nay, she began mentally to compare him with other young men she knew, who rather prided themselves on having a pretty wit; and she was profoundly grateful to this one for not being facetious. Was it his extreme and obvious respect for the Bean-an-Tighearn that kept him so retrained? At all events, Eelin found

no fault with him; and as for herself, on this occasion she indulged in no wild paradoxes or other romps.

When the ladies rose from table, Miss Eelin went and fetched from the sideboard a box of cigars.

"I fear you will suspect them," she said, "in a house governed by womenfolk."

But Somerled turned from her to her mother.

"I understood that you and your daughter generally went out into the garden on these fine evenings," said he, almost timidly. "If you would allow us to accompany you, I am sure both my father and myself would rather do that."

"Indeed yes, madam," put in the elder Macdonald. "And it's the boy's last evening in the Highlands, for the present, at least."

"Oh, by all means—by all means!" said their silver-haired and sweet-voiced hostess. "Will you come with me, Mr. Macdonald?"

She put her hand lightly on his arm, and in this way guided him into and through the drawing-room, and out by the French windows, and across the lawn to her favourite walk under the lime-trees, on the raised embankment overlooking the wide-flowing stream. It was a gracious evening, the golden glow gradually giving place to a clear and tender twilight, the foliage of the woods opposite becoming more and more intensely green, the swinging current showing sharp glints of a steely grey. Hardly a sound broke the listening silence, save the occasional muffled bark of a dog, or the distant rumble of a cart making its way into the town. Then the air bore about with it many fragrances; altogether,

it was an hour that Somerled Macdonald was likely to remember, when he was far enough away from these tranquil scenes.

For it was no other than the Daughter of the House of Kinvaig who was walking with him, and doing her best—and not failing much—to interest him with her quick-witted ways, her bright humour, and her shrewd and varied knowledge both of human nature and of books that seemed surprising in one of her years. And then, besides, to complete the undoing of him, he had never before, on their previous visit, seen the living beauty of her face so animated and radiant, he had never so entirely succumbed to the glance, casual and unintentional as it might be, of her all-conquering eyes. He began to wonder where he had seen something like those eyes; and at length he remembered. It was when his father and he, on their voyage hither, had been coming up Loch Linnhe. A wild day it was, with a brisk north-easter blowing; but gradually the heavens had opened overhead, and there shone along the wind-driven sea a lustrous blue, while the surrounding mountains of Morven and Kingairloch remained dark and sombre—ay, nearly as black as Eelin Macdonald's out-curving lashes. So that was the strange combination he saw here repeated in little? He did not know that her Gaelic-speaking friends called her Eelin of the wave-blue eyes; it was a similitude that his Celtic perception had recognised for himself.

"Do you know, Miss Macdonald," said he, "that I heard you sing 'The Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond' when you thought there was no one by? It was when

my father and I called the other day; and the drawing-room windows were open; so that we heard quite clearly. And I was going to ask you what version that was you sung. The ordinary version has become very popular among the Highlanders in Ontario—"

"I am sorry to hear that," said she.

"Why?" he asked, in some amazement.

"Because it is spurious. It isn't a Highland song at all; and it isn't a Lowland Scotch song; it's nothing—but trash. The curious thing," she continued—and she appeared to have forgotten all about her resolve to rebel against the domination of his quiet steady look: she was talking to him in the most unconcerned and simple and natural fashion—"is that the refrain and the air seem to be genuine, and yet I can't find any trace of either amongst the old books except, perhaps, there is some suggestion of 'The Bonnie House o' Airlie;' and I have got a good number of them—it's rather a hobby of mine, hunting about among the old tunes—the 'Orpheus Caledonius,' the 'Highland Fair,' and collections of that sort; yet I can't find any definite origin for 'The Banks of Loch Lomond.' The story that both words and music were taken down from the singing of a little boy in Edinburgh streets won't answer at all; the little street-boys in Edinburgh are not in the habit of singing 'Where in purple hue the Hieland hills we view.' What is that? Is it Highland, or is it Scotch, or is it—rubbish? It's rubbish!"

"Then where did you get the version I heard you sing?" he asked. "I thought it was beautiful!"

"Oh, don't say that!" she answered him, with a bit of a laugh. "For if I must confess, I scribbled the

lines myself. I don't think much of them—they are rather poor——"

"They are beautiful!" he said again.

"No, no; they are poor enough; but at least they're not so awful as the other ones: are they, now? Oh, if Kingsley were alive, what an exquisite little ballad he might write to that refrain! Or Mr. Swinburne could do it if he chose—his Northumbrian poems are admirable. But I daren't write and make the suggestion; he would merely think I wanted his autograph——"

"Miss Macdonald," he said, submissively, "is your harp still in the summer-house over there?"

"Yes——"

"I wish you would let my father hear one or two of the old airs you speak of," said he (for he would not presume to ask on his own account).

"Those that can best be sung to the harp are mostly plaintive," she said.

"Why not?"

By this time the elder Macdonald and his hostess had betaken themselves to a garden-seat which was not very far from the summer-house; and there was tea on the small table before them.

"Very well," said Eelin, "if you will go and join them, I will try to sing you one or two of the older things."

She went and hid herself in her bower of white roses and honeysuckle: she preferred being unseen when she was singing. And presently, in the mystic grey of the twilight that was stealing over the world—in a stillness that was hardly broken by the hushed murmur of the stream—they heard the first notes of the prelude. They

did not recognise the air; but the elder Macdonald, at least, knew the words well—

"It was a' for our rightfu' King
We left fair Scotland's strand!
It was a' for our rightfu' King
We e'er saw Irish land,
My dear,
We e'er saw Irish land."

And where and how could this slip of a girl have had experience of the tragic side of life that she should be able to put such pathos into this simple strain?

"She hasn't much of a voice," said her mother, as a kind of apology to her guests, "but she has been trained fairly well. We spent two winters in Milan." Neither of them replied to her: one of them, indeed, could not have spoken at this moment—his heart was like to burst within him, so sensitive and responsive was he to the thrill of those pathetic tones.

"The sodger frae the war returns,
The sailor frae the main;
But I hae parted frae my love
Never to meet again,
My dear,
Never to meet again.

When day is gane, an' night is come,
An' a' folk bound to sleep,
I think on him that's far awa,
The lee-lang night, an' weep,
My dear,
The lee-lang night, an' weep."

In the silence that followed not a word was said by anyone. And then the trembling strings were touched again; and she sang *The Broom of* Cowdenknows—

O the Broom, the bonny Broom,
The Broom of Cowdenknows;
I wish I were at hame again,
To milk my Daddy's Ews.

And again she sang *The Wawking of the Fauld.*

"My *Peggy* speaks sae sweetly,
Whene'er we meet alane,
I wish nae mair, to lay my Care,
I wish nae mair, of a' that's rare.

My *Peggy* speaks sae sweetly,
To a' the Lave I'm cauld;
But she gars a' my Spirits glow
At Wawking of the Fauld."

And that was followed by *Were na my Hearts light I wad dee*—

"His Kin was for ane of a higher Degree,
Said, what had he do with the Likes of me?
Suppose I was bonny, I was na for *Johnny;*
And were na my Hearts light I wad dee."

Then she stepped forth from her hiding-place, and approached them, rather bashfully.

"These are one or two of the old airs," she said, with some affectation of carelessness.

"And one thing I know," said the elder Macdonald. "They have never been sung like that since first they were written down." The younger Macdonald did not trust himself to offer even a word of thanks: he held his peace.

"But won't you come into the house now?" she continued. "It's getting dark. Or would you rather look at Lily Neile fishing?—She throws a good line."

For a moment they could not understand what she meant; but Somerled Macdonald followed the direction her eyes indicated; and now he perceived that a new feature had stolen unobserved into the scene before them. Out on the middle of the river, that had become of a livid and leaden hue in the mysterious twilight, there was a ghostly white boat; and standing upright in the boat was a dim grey figure—the figure of a young girl who with regular and graceful movement was plying a salmon rod. The line itself was invisible; but they could see by the forward and upright action of her arms that she was throwing well; while inch by inch the boat was allowed to creep down with the current. It was a spectral performance, and so silent that it all seemed unreal: was this a spirit-maiden and a spirit-boat that had come gliding into the vague incertitude that prevailed around?

"Let us go over and see if she has any luck," said Eelin. "She is getting near a good place."

Thereupon Miss Eelin crossed the tennis-lawn, towards the high and railed bank overlooking the river; and Somerled accompanied her; but the mother, with her usual consideration, recognising that this could be no entertainment for a sightless man, again placed her hand lightly on her companion's arm, and said—

"We may as well go into the house, Mr. Macdonald; they will follow directly."

And still the grey lady plied her phantom rod; and still old Fergus, himself but a shadow, allowed the magic craft to creep stealthily down.

"Lily!" Eelin called aloud to the apparition out in mid-stream. "Lily!—what have you got on?"

It was a somewhat ambiguous question; but at once the answer came back from the dark and palpable obscure.

"White Wing!"

"Have you seen anything?" was the next question.

"About thirty dozen—jumping everywhere—and I haven't had one rise!"

"You should try the Devil's Kirn over again. Good-night!" This was the final call to the wraith out there in the hollow gloom; for Eelin had just become aware that the other two had gone indoors; and now she turned away from the river, she and her companion, to rejoin them.

And as they were making across the lawn towards the house, Somerled Macdonald said to her, in rather a hesitating way—

"I have a great favour to ask of you, Miss Macdonald. You know, I cannot in the least tell when I may be able to return to this country. And since I have been here I have heard a good deal—but I have guessed more—as to what you and your mother, you especially, have been doing for my kinsfolk; yes, I must call them my kinsfolk, for so I have been brought up to regard them; and the gratitude I feel to you about it is more than I can put into words. But here is something more practical, and I hope you won't take it ill. Will you—for a time at least, and to a small extent—will you become my almoner? You see, out in Canada, how can I learn anything?—whereas you are on the spot; you know all these people; you are interested in them; you are friends with them. And a young fellow might want a decent suit of clothes if he was applying for a situa-

tion; or a girl might want a few ribbons for her wedding-day: it isn't fair that your mother and you should be expected to do everything simply because you are the head of the House of Kinvaig. I hope you won't take it ill that I should ask you—"

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald!" she remonstrated. "Take it ill? How can you think of such a thing?"

"Well," he said, "I am going away early to-morrow; and I thought I might as well bring along a cheque for the amount—it's only a temporary provision—there's more where that came from—there's plenty more where that came from—for the same purpose. And I have made the cheque payable to you, for I would not trouble your mother; indeed I understand you are her almoner too—oh, yes, I have heard in Invernish of your kindness, your charities, and your dependants, both there and in Glengarva; and if you would be so friendly as to allow me to help—in this rough and brutal way—it's the only thing I can do—"

"Of course I should have to ask permission of my mother first," she said. "Shall we go in now?"

She opened the French windows, and they passed into the lamp-lit drawing-room; and without more ado, she placed Somerled Macdonald's proposal, with the explanatory circumstances, before her mother. The Bean-an-Tighearn gave a smiling acquiescence; and Somerled took an envelope from his pocket, and somewhat shyly placed it on the table. That was all: he seemed relieved when the incident was over.

But after the two Macdonalds had gone—they did not prolong their stay, on account of the younger man's departure on the morrow—when Eelin took up this en-

velope and casually opened it, and looked at the cheque, she uttered an exclamation.

"Mother!" she cried—and she seemed quite aghast. "See what he has done!"

Well, her mother also appeared somewhat dismayed when she regarded this bluish-white slip of paper; for on it she read: *Montreal and Provincial Bank, Limited. . . . Pay to Miss Eelin Macdonald, or Order . . . One Thousand Pounds . . .* £1,000 *. . . Somerled Macdonald.*

"It will be a great responsibility, Eelin," said she, still regarding the paper.

"Oh, yes, yes," said the girl, instantly clutching at the hope of escape. "Far too great! I did not dream of anything so serious. Such a sum—even from the Canadian Railway King—as his father sometimes calls him—how can I accept it?—I couldn't—I couldn't! Now if he had entrusted it to you; but then he said he did not wish to trouble you; and I promised without imagining he could be so recklessly generous. And what is to be done? I must ask him to take it back!"

"That is the one thing you can not do," said her mother, with unusual decision, "if I know anything of either of those two men. It would be little better than an insult."

"Mother, I hardly even thanked him!" Eelin exclaimed again. And then after a moment or two she said: "So you really think I am bound to accept this tremendous responsibility? Very well, but first of all I must write and explain; yes, indeed; and if I did not thank him before, I will now—ah, I will—I will! His father wlll give me his address. And I will take time; I will take time, and consider; and he shall see whether

the Kinvaig Macdonalds of the old country are an ungrateful lot of folk—if a letter can tell him anything!"

And so it was that early on the next morning Somerled Macdonald set out on his return to his western home. But he was a very different man from the Somerled Macdonald who had only a few weeks previously landed on English shores: he was carrying with him a wound the depth and permanency of which he himself perhaps did not as yet wholly understand.

CHAPTER IX.

HITHER AND THITHER.

At an early hour of the following day, Wild Eelin, with black Beelzebub perched on her shoulder, marched into the first-floor bath-room, to get some water for the flowers in her mother's boudoir. It was a glorious morning: the world a blaze of splendour; the window had been thrown wide open; and the branches of the row of elms and limes that formed a screen between the back of the house and the main garden were all shimmering and glittering and dancing in the sunlight. She was just about to fill the jug at the lavatory when she heard voices immediately underneath—in the wide open space, partly flagged and partly sward, that served chiefly as a drying-green; and out of mischief she stayed her hand. For well she knew who these two were; indeed, by peeping over an inch or two, she could have had them in full view: one of them, Maxwell the Scotch gardener, a little, wizened, pippin-faced, winking-eyed man, who had just been into the kitchen with the

day's supply of vegetables; the other a big, raw-boned, freckled, red-haired Highland lass, by name Morag, who was fixing clothes along one of the lines. At the moment they did not seem to be on the best of terms.

"I tell ye, ye've no introspection!" he said, tauntingly.

She flushed up in anger.

"Maybe I have, and maybe I have not," she answered him. "But it is none of your business; and if you will say such things to me, I will be telling my mistress, yes, I will!"

"Ye're as Hielan's Mull!" he said, with contempt.

"And that," she retorted, with equal contempt, "is better than a little Lowland body whatever."

He was about to move off, himself and his wooden basket; but then he turned and addressed her again; he had apparently something that he was determined to communicate to her limited intelligence.

"Can ye understand this, now?" he said to her, menacingly. "I tell ye, ye've no introspection; or ye would ken that the soul and the body are twa different things: ay, and that the soul can leave the body, just as it diz when ye're asleep and dreamin': ay, and what's to hinder anither soul frae comin' back to your empty body, and making ye think an' feel like somebody else? Do ye understand that now?"

She did not reply, for she had a clothes-pin in her mouth—quite unnecessarily distending the same. So he proceeded:

"Did ye ever hear tell of David Haggart, that was hanged at Edinburgh, the 18th of July, 1821? He was the cleverest pickpocket and jile-breaker in a' the South

o' Scotland and the North of England too; ay, and when he was pitten in jile to be hanged for the murder, he wrote out the confessions o' his hale life; so that one that's like him in the body micht very weel become the receptacle o' his wanderin' soul; ay, and feel and think just like him. Look at my forks!"

He extended to her the fore and middle fingers of his right hand, rather drawing in the middle finger, so that they appeared to be nearly of the same length.

"D'ye see that, now?—thae twa fingers equal: Haggart was born that way: he was bound to be a thief. Dod, them's the fingers that can get into a keek-cloy——"

"And maybe you will be telling me what that is, when it is at home," she remarked, still somewhat scornfully—but she was interested, and even impressed.

"Keek-cloy? It's a breeches-pocket, and that's what it is——"

"And are you proud, then," she said, in her Highland accent, "that you are able to be a thief?"

"That's naething to do with it, ye gomeril, if ye would listen and understand," he exclaimed. And then he continued, in a low and earnest voice, fixing his nervously-twitching eyes upon her: "How do ye ken that it's no David Haggart that's talking to ye at this verra meenit—David Haggart that murdered the jiler in Dumfries? Ay, I thocht that would mak ye stare! And what's to hinder? They hanged the body o'm and buried the body o'm, in Edinburgh, in the year 1821; but his soul gangs skelpin about wi' the lave; and what's to hinder it frae taking lodgement in me, John Maxwell,

for a day, or an hour, or aiblins five meenits; so that it's David Haggart's feelins that's inside me, ay, and his desires, and his black thochts. Diz that no frichten ye? —that maybe it's a murderer that's talkin' to ye at this meenit—no John Maxwell at a', but David Haggart the murderer—and thinking such thochts as daurna be named. For that's what they ca' the transmotion o' souls; and it's gospel truth; and it's no merely that ye can look at David Haggart's fingers—it's himself that may be speakin' to ye—oot o' a dark imagination."

The big, uncouth Highland lass began to yield to the spell; she was "glowering" at him with concentrated eyes; if she only half-comprehended his meaning, she was none the less conscious that there was some possibility of horror lurking behind the mysterious solemnity of his tones.

"Did ye never hear tell of the iron helmet of Kilmainham?" he went on—and he held her enchained as a serpent holds a trembling and struggling bird. "That was when Haggart was in jile in Ireland; and he was impident to the jiler; and they put that awfu' thing ower his head, a cage of iron bars and an iron tongue that went into his mouth. And when they took it off he spent the whole of the rest of that day in singing a' the wild and wicked songs he could remember, for there was no kind o' sin or iniquity that wasna but child's play to him. And if ye would tak heed to this now, that when ye're comin' through the gairden ye may be thinkin' it's me ye're talkin' to; ay, but it's the spirit o' David Haggart may be answerin' ye—the spirit of a black murderer—that wrote out his ain life in the condemned cell at

Edinburgh; his inmost thochts are there—ye can amaist hear'm speakin——"

It was at this point that Miss Eelin, standing at the open window just above them, took down Beelzebub from her shoulder, got hold of him fore and aft, and gently dropped him so that he lit with protruded claws on the old gardener's head. The commotion that ensued was instantaneous and fearsome; for the startled yell of pain and terror wrung from old Maxwell was as nothing to the shrill shriek after shriek uttered by the panic-stricken laundry-maid. Miss Eelin now deemed it prudent to retire from the window; she filled the jug at the bath instead of at the lavatory; and then with a calm and serene countenance—lest she should meet anyone in the corridor—she proceeded to her mother's room.

But there was nothing demure or austere in her manner when, a little while thereafter, she started off for the town. She had a thousand pound cheque in her purse; that gave her a fine sense of personal importance; and she walked with a gay bearing and a buoyant stride. And yet there was not much real swagger under this appearance of bravado: for she was a humorous kind of creature; and whenever she caught herself giving herself airs, she recalled a couple of lines from one of her old ballads, that invariably set her laughing. It was a vivid picture that this refrain presented to her imagination—

> "Stand about, ye fisher jauds,
> And gie my gown room!"

—and on this occasion, as she was going into Invernish, the verses would keep recurring to her brain:

"I'll gar our gudeman trow
  I'll sell the ladle,
If he winna buy to me
  A bonnie side-saddle,
To ride to kirk and bridal,
  And round about the town;
Stand about, ye fisher jauds,
And gie my gown room!

* * *

I'll gar our gudeman trow
  That I'm gaun to die,
If he winna fee to me
  Valets twa or three,
To bear my train up frae the dirt,
  And ush me through the town;
Stand about, ye fisher jauds,
And gie my gown room!"

Indeed, she was giggling to herself as she ascended the stair leading to the office of her mother's solicitors; but the moment she had opened the door—and found herself confronted by the young men in the outer apartment—she was Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig again, very courteous, and polite, and dignified; and so she was when she was ushered into an inner room, where she seriously conversed with Mr. Innes about the safe disposal of this considerable sum; and so she was when subsequently she went along to the railway-station, and sought an audience of the station-master.

"Mr. Forbes," said she, "I want you to reserve a third-class compartment for me, by the three o'clock train."

"For you, Miss Macdonald?" said the tall, portly, good-natured official, looking down upon her with a paternal, and yet puzzled, air.

"Yes. You remember that young fellow Geddes who

got smashed about a fortnight ago by the runaway horse and van. He's doing fairly well; but we want to send him to our Convalescent Home—at Nairn, you know; and he'll have to be carried along here on a stretcher; and I want a compartment kept for himself and a nurse, so that he shan't be stared at by strangers."

"Oh, now I understand: well, I'll see what we can do for you," said the station-master.

"Oh, but I want a definite promise," said she. "I know you are always very busy; and there's generally a desperate rush about that three o'clock train; and when it's only as far as Nairn, I think you might stretch a point——"

"I'll go along and see to it myself this very moment," he said; and he lifted his hat to the young lady, and hurried away: he had not much time, during official hours, for general conversation.

So Eelin was left alone on the platform. She did not at once turn and set out for home. She was gazing, rather absently, at the lines of rail that led away from where she stood, narrowing and narrowing until they disappeared at the first curve. These were but the beginning of a long journey that had been undertaken that morning. They had a vacant look now; and she had a dim impression that all the world around her had in a measure grown empty too; and along with this she experienced an unaccountable feeling of remorse and regret. She did not know what it was she had done, or left undone, that vaguely disturbed her so; but of a sudden she thought she would go away and endeavour to find old Mr. Macdonald, and, if she was so fortunate as to

encounter him, she would try to say the kindest things to him she was capable of saying.

There was the initial difficulty that she shrank from calling at his hotel, to inquire as to his whereabouts; but luck was on her side; for no sooner had she passed out from the station than she descried in the distance, in Union-street, the erect and lofty figure of the blind man, accompanied by Angus, the water-bailiff. It is true, they were going away from her; and it would never do for Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig to be seen running along one of the principal streets of Invernish; but she at once got hold of a small boy, gave him a penny, and bade him fly after the tall gentleman, and ask him to stop for a minute. The result was satisfactory; she received and returned the heartiest of greetings; and of course she shook hands with Angus as well, and inquired about his daughter up at Ben Vora. Then Angus fell behind; she took his place; and the three of them together proceeded on their way, which happened to be nowhither in particular.

"I suppose Mr. Somerled left this morning?" she said, by way of inviting communications.

"Yes, poor chap," his father answered her. "He was rather down in the mouth. Not that he said much. He is of a strong and earnest nature; but he does not talk too freely about himself. What I could best make out was he had come to the conclusion that this country was no country for him."

"No country for him?" she repeated, in surprise—and perhaps with a twinge of disappointment too. "Why?"

"Well, I did not myself quite understand," the elder

Macdonald went on. "He said something about there being too much romance in the air—likely to lead to wild fancies—and to carry one off one's head. He said it would steady his nerves a bit when he got back to the price of steel rails, the state of the labour market, and problems of that kind."

She was clearly crestfallen; but of course he did not perceive it—except, perhaps, in her altered tone.

"I thought he had a great affection," said she, in a hurt sort of way, "for the land of his forefathers, the land of his kinsmen and his clan."

"That is the faith he has been brought up in, and he is not likely to fall away from it," was the reply.

"And what fault has he to find with the country, or with the people either?" she demanded, rather proudly, "that he should prefer to get back to steel rails and the labour market?"

"Nay, dear young lady, but I think it's the other way about," said old Macdonald, in a placable fashion. "Coming among his kinsfolk, and seeing the actual places that he had known only by name, and living in an atmosphere of historical and poetical associations—well, all that may be unsettling to a man of business habits and pursuits; and then, I fancy, being in the old home of his race, and seeing and hearing so much of the loyal clan-spirit, and the self-sacrifice and the generosity of other people—yourself not the least of them, if I may say so—he has been troubling himself that he could do nothing: an unworthy son of the Kinvaig Macdonalds he felt himself to be—though that naturally is not my opinion—for there are worse lads than Somerled—and he has not had much opportunity——"

"He could do nothing?" she exclaimed, rushing to the other extreme. "But didn't he tell you what happened last night?—the money he left with me on trust—"

"Well, he doesn't talk much, as I say. He did mention something the other day of asking either your mother or yourself to take charge of some small sum that might be of benefit to those who were more or less dependent on you——"

"A small sum, Mr. Macdonald? It was a thousand pounds."

The old man laughed.

"That's like Somerled," was all he remarked, half to himself, and not by way of reprobation.

"And you must give me his address, Mr. Macdonald," she resumed, "for I did not at all thank him properly; and he will consider me so ungrateful if I do not write; and besides I would like to place before him a few indications as to how the money can be used—"

"I am certain he would much prefer to leave it entirely to your own discretion—"

"Oh," said she, rather shortly, "if he is so busy—steel rails and the labour market—perhaps he would not care to have a letter from me? I should not like to intrude—"

"A letter from you," said old Macdonald, gravely, "is, I am sure, what he does not expect. He would not presume so far. I know him. But if you were, out of your goodness and your gentleness, to send him a letter—that would be a very proud day for him—"

"Why, of course I must write to him!" she cried. "What would he think of me if I didn't?—no, what should I think of myself?"

She took out her little note-book, and pencilled down the address. By this time they had reached the riverside; and she was about due at home, for luncheon; yet she knew she had not been half so kind to the old gentleman as she had intended to be: they had been talking about Somerled Macdonald all the time. So she said—

"I hope you won't find Invernish very dull now that your son has gone."

"Oh, no," said he, cheerfully enough. "Angus and I get on famously. And we are planning a few excursions. I would like to go down to Fort William, and strike inland a bit; it is on one of the Corriechoillie pools, on the Spean, that I caught my first fish—"

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald," she cried, eagerly—for here was an opening—"are you a salmon-fisher?"

"I used to wet a line now and again," he responded. "But of course I have never thought of such a thing since the railway accident that made me what I am."

"Ah, but you could do perfectly well!" she said, with conviction. "There is not the slightest difficulty. All you want is someone with you to tell you where to stand—and when to put out more line—and how to keep clear of the trees. If you would like to try, I think I could get you a day on the Laggan Water, on the Nish here; I am almost sure I could; General Mallock is a particular friend of mine. And I would go with you, as well as Angus; for I know all the pools—"

"Miss Macdonald," he remonstrated—and he seemed to be greatly touched by this offer on her part—"do you think I could accept such a favour from you?—taking up your time—and troubling you—"

"I should like it!" she said: and without a moment's pause she continued: "Well, that's settled. And as soon as I have seen General Mallock, I will send you word about the day. And if you provide the carriage—it's a drive of four or five miles—I will provide the luncheon, for I know better than Angus what should go in the basket. Now, I must hurry home, Mr. Macdonald. Mind you come in and have a chat with us, any time you are walking up the river-side." So they parted; and for a moment or two old Allan Macdonald stood there motionless: it was as if he were trying to image the retreating figure—trying to look after her with his sightless eyes.

Now this was a Saturday; and when Eelin got home, and when the two ladies had taken their places for lunch, her mother said to her—

"I have just been reading to-day's *Observer.*"

"I had no time to look at it this morning," was the off-hand answer. "But I know it's a poor number. There's nothing of mine in it."

"Isn't there?" her mother said, sharply. "Eelin, have you been playing tricks with me? Are you 'Fairfax'?"

"'Fairfax'? Good gracious, how could I be! Why, I introduced him to you, mother, only the other day, at the corner of Union-street!"

"It is somewhat remarkable, then, that he should describe, with singular minuteness, the very incident you told me of—the taking of a salmon in the twilight, just out there, with the whole town of Invernish looking on."

"But if all the people of Invernish were looking on," she responded gaily, "and as he is one of the people of Invernish, then he must have been looking on. Now

that's what they call logic. Mother, dear, every other day I am giving you proof after proof of the greatness of my mind!"

"But there is one thing he describes," the mother proceeded, "in this article, that you did not mention. He says that a young lady, 'the representative of an old and honoured name,' took part in the affair, especially towards the end. Well, I must say it was rather a conspicuous thing for any girl to do—before such a crowd—and she being apparently quite alone too——"

At these simple and yet terrible words the easy *nonchalance* of Miss Eelin's manner had abruptly fled: and it was as well that her mother had ceased to regard her, for her face was aglow with shame and apprehension.

"Yes—and of course," said she, rather breathlessly, "of course—an anonymous writer—an anonymous writer—could not miss the chance; of course he has taken the opportunity of being facetious—he has tried to be witty—to throw ridicule on the girl——"

"Oh, no," the mother rejoined, placidly, "not at all. I think the young man—if it is the same young man we met—rather deserves commendation. His reference to the young lady who helped to land the fish is done very nicely—done with discretion—and with evident respect. I don't think she will have any reason to complain, if she ever sees it."

Instantly Eelin's spirits jumped up again. She had not been made fun of, then? She would not have to carry the war into the enemy's country, to compass her revenge?

"Well, mother," she said, in her usual buoyant way,

"why shouldn't you cultivate the young man's acquaintance, and get to know him better? You've only had experience of one genius—that's me. And you've had enough of me. Why not try this other one?—he might turn out to be a coruscator——"

"A what?"

"A coruscator—one that coruscates; just as an imperator is one that imperates," she replied, as bold as brass; and then she went on: "Why don't you ask him to lunch? He saved the life of poor Dickon, that certainly would have been caught and eaten by General Mallock's cat. Fancy the honour of entertaining a poet at lunch!"

But this wild project did not at the moment recommend itself to the Bean-an-Tighearn; and, as their brief and frugal repast very soon came to an end, nothing further was said. The moment that her mother had finished, Eelin was on her feet.

"Give me the key of the cellaret, mother; I want some brandy for my flask."

"I thought you said the poor lad was quite strong enough now to be moved without risk?"

"So he is, I think. But there will be the jolting in getting him into the railway-carriage. It's better to be on the safe side."

Accordingly she filled the little silver flask with brandy-and-water; and presently she was hurrying on her way into the town, making for a very humble tenement in one of the outlying quarters, and for an equally humble lodging contained therein. Old Maxwell (perhaps with David Haggart's soul inside him) had preceded her hither; and he and she and the nurse set to

work to get the poor chap, whose knees had been badly smashed by the runaway horse and van, conveyed to the railway-station. They were in abundance of time; Mr. Forbes had reserved a third-class compartment; and they soon had the convalescent comfortably placed; while Maxwell got into the carriage too, to help the nurse at the termination of the journey. Eelin waited for the train to start; and saw them safely off; then the bustle on the platform gradually died away; the porters dispersed in search of other duties; and once more she was left alone, as she had been earlier in the day.

And there before her were the long and narrowing lines of rail that had awakened some curious fancies—and also a dim, unintelligible feeling of compunction and regret—an hour or two before. Since then, moreover, she had heard something that still further had disquieted her.

"This country is no country for him?" she kept repeating to herself, in a kind of wistful fashion. "No country for him? What could he mean by that?"

CHAPTER X.

A HARBOUR OF REFUGE.

On a Monday morning the young men and young women of Struthers's shop—establishment, perhaps one ought to say—returned to their monotonous toil with a dull sense of inevitableness and resignation; but their master arrived in a very different mood; he came back more determined than ever to whip up this idle crew by lashing them with his vituperative tongue. Everything

was wrong; nothing was right; objurgations, taunts, envenomed innuendoes thickened the air; a Newhaven fishwife in a fury would have been smothered into silence by this male virago. But on this particular Monday morning his insensate invective was more especially directed against a hapless young person who doubtless had been guilty of an act of carelessness: the facts being these. On the Saturday a box of kid gloves had been shown to a customer, who had ruthlessly hauled about the contents; by some accident the lid had got slipped on again; the young woman behind the counter, subsequently setting things right, made the mistake of thinking that this box had not been opened, and put it back on the shelf; then, somehow or other, on the Monday morning the box had fallen into the hands of Struthers himself, who, on discovering its dishevelled condition, broke out into an ungovernable rage. Of course the poor lass had no excuse to offer; she had not a word to say for herself; she could only suffer this continuous whirlwind of abuse, while trying to go about her work in a mechanical way; and she tried to hide from her companions the tears that would keep trickling down her cheeks. Well, the long and the short of it was that Archie Gilchrist lost his head. He left his recessed corner, and strode out into the middle of the floor—his cheeks very white.

"Will ye stop that viperous tongue o' yours, ye miserable creature, or I'll fling ye into the street!" he said in a panting kind of way—and indeed to the astounded and frightened bystanders it seemed as though he was going to put his threat into execution there and then. "If ye were a man ye would take shame to

yourself, to bully a girl like that! But you a man?—you a man?—you misbegotten imp!——"

Struthers's eyes appeared to be starting from their sockets. He could not find speech. He could only point with a shaking forefinger to the door.

"Go!" he managed to say at last. "Go!"—

"When I'm ready," Gilchrist replied; and he went back to his desk, and took his Horace and his Livy and the little Latin dictionary; he reached down his cap and put it on; and then, amidst an awe-stricken silence, he marched forth from the shop. It was all the work of one wild minute: the consequences were likely to be more protracted.

His first sensation, out here in the open, was of a wondering and joyous liberty. He was free! He had no longer a master, to browbeat him at every turn. The leaden drag of account-books in hopeless arrear of making-up he had cast for ever behind him. The great wide world was before him, with all its boundless possibilities; he was a man among his fellow-men, and no longer a slave; he had come into possession of his birthright; he claimed his share of the beneficent sunlight, the moving clouds, the colour of the hills, and there was no one to say him nay. And so, in this new spirit of enfranchisement, and with a light heart and an agile step, he breasted the steep slope leading up the Castle hill; until on the summit he paused to regard the spacious panorama stretching away on every hand. His soul rose within him at the sight. He felt that he had attained to a larger horizon; that his prison-bands were broken for ever.

Yes; but up yonder in the north were the dim and

billowy mountains of Ross-shire; and somewhere not far from the base was the little town of Dingwall; and in that town lived a poor and solitary widow whose nervous anxiety about her son's future was not altogether due to selfish considerations. And what would she say to this terrifying story? It is true that every shilling he could save he sent her; and that, along with the small pension allotted her by the railway company on the tragic death of her husband, who had been plate-layer on the line, just enabled her to tide along in a kind of way; but it was not of herself she would be thinking. The very width of that horizon, which to his imagination had seemed so welcome a thing, would appal her. Might she not even implore him to go back? The little tyrant might yet be propitiated by a sufficiently servile attitude and a sufficiently humble apology. For while the poor lone woman was well aware of her son's pulsating hopes and vaguely ambitious aims—and in secret consoled many a weary hour by participating in them, and picturing to herself the great things he was to do—still she knew that he had a safe and solid foothold in Struthers's shop. Latin, Greek, geology, metaphysics, and literary contributions to the Invernish *Observer* might all be indulged in, while there was a secure twenty-six shillings coming in at the end of the week; but with nothing at all coming in, of what avail would they be? And anything—anything—rather than that he should allow his life-insurance to lapse; for might not the lad marry, one of these days, when she herself had been laid to rest; and would not that be a necessary provision for the young wife?

These were the urgent problems he found himself

face to face with as he left the breezy heights of the Castle hill and set out upon a meditative expedition along the unfrequented roads and paths in the environs of the town. He knew his way well; these were to him familiar haunts; he had even projected a little volume, to be called "Rambles Round Invernish." But now, as he followed the ascending and descending highways and byways that led through the undulating country, his brain was not filled with poetic reverie nor yet with the restless promptings of an indeterminate ambition. Sterner and immediate necessities were pressing in upon him. Even that glowing and tingling sense of freedom that had gone galloping through his veins had subsided now: liberty was all very well, but one might have too much of it. Was not man born to labour—and to shackles and chains? 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.' Well, he was not averse from that either. He was no shirker of work. Nay, the imperative thing for him at this moment was to find work of any kind, lest he perish utterly, and the poor old woman up there in Dingwall became destitute in her old age.

So he blindly wandered on, paying little heed to his surroundings. Sometimes he would be deep down in the hollow of the woods, the overarching elms and sycamores causing a soft green obscurity, save where a shaft of sunlight pierced the dense canopy of leaves, to touch with a golden stain the mossy wall by the roadside. Or again he would be up on the higher levels, looking abroad over the cultivated uplands now rich with the yellow bounties of autumn, or getting an occasional glimpse of the wilder country in the south, where the mountains about Glen Urquhart rose pale and visionary

into the silver and blue of the sky. But these were not what he really saw. It was South Africa he was staring at, in this rapt way—contemplating the varied opportunities it offered to a young fellow of firm physique, ready to turn his hand to anything, and not anxious to spare himself. Moreover, he had learned to stick on the back of a horse; and, if the worst came to the worst, was there not the Cape Mounted Police? And then South Africa in its turn faded out of those illusory dreams; he knew the old mother up in Dingwall would never consent. South Africa to her would be like a parting at the side of the grave. No; it was in Invernish that he must find something to do; and so of a sudden he dismissed these roving fancies; he wheeled round and set off for the town, resolved upon consulting Tom Grieve, who had seemed to him a friendly kind of man. He found the sub-editor in his own room; and told his story. Grieve's bright little black eyes regarded him critically and cautiously.

"And what are ye going to do now?" he asked.

"I am ready to do anything," was the natural reply. "But, if possible, I would rather not go back to the clerking. It's a poorly paid business; it's entirely overstocked; and it offers you no kind of future. But then beggars must not be choosers; I'm ready for anything; and I thought it possible you might know——"

"They say that when one door shuts another opens," observed the billious-hued sub-editor, who seemed to be rather more circumspect and reticent than usual, "and it is something of a coincidence that you should come here just now. Well, no, it is hardly a coincidence either; for I've had this conjunction of affairs before my

mind for some months back; and the truth is I did once or twice think of you—though I was sweert to tempt ye away from a settled and respectable way of living to join the Ishmaelites. Maybe there was another reason—but we'll let that flea stick to the wa'. Now this is the way of it. Our Doctor here—Dr. Gillespie—has just gone red wild mad about golf since ever he went to live at Nairn; and if ye want him to write a leader, ye've to take a corkscrew before ye can get it out o' him. And as for the rest of the editorial work, he's been putting more and more of it on to my shoulders—not that I complain—not a bit: for it is his own suggestion that I should get an assistant——"

The twinkling black eyes glimmered with something of a humorous light.

"Will I tell ye the honest reason, then, why I hung back? Ye see, I've got a pretty snug berth here; it just suits me; and what for should I have some interloper coming in to learn the tricks of the trade, and maybe offering to do my work at a lesser salary? Where should I be then? I'm plain with ye, ye see."

Archie Gilchrist's frame began to throb with a strange anxiety.

"Do you mean that there was such an opening?" he asked rather breathlessly. "And that you thought of me in connection with it?"

"I mean that there is such an opening; and I mean that I am thinking of you in connection with it—if you like the work, and are satisfied with the pay. Come," said he, with a trifle more of his customary bluff good-nature, "I'm pretty sure you wouldn't be after any underhand play. I'll take the risk. I'll invite the

cuckoo into my nest. If you can arrange matters with the Doctor, I am content; and if you take over the news department, and the reviewing of the magazines, then I should have so much more time for the leaders and the correspondence."

Here indeed was an amazing prospect!—the gates of the enchanted land thrown wide to him, in the most unexpected manner, and just when he had been contemplating all sorts and kinds of prosaic drudgery as his probable fate. He could hardly reply; it seemed too good to be true; moreover, how was he to thank his generous patron for the measure of self-sacrifice on his part that seemed to be darkly involved?

"If there was such a chance for me," he said, quickly (and striving to conceal his eagerness) "it would not be a question of pay. Oh, no; I should only want what I could live on; and a few shillings more for one that I am bound to. And if I could do the work at all, you would not find me remiss. No, nor ungrateful. I understand well that it is to your good offices I should owe the place——"

"Enough said—enough said," replied the sub-editor, in a large and tolerant manner, to his *protégé*. "We'd better get the business clinched at once. For a miracle the Doctor has come in to the office to-day—I'll take ye to his room.

Archie Gilchrist would much rather have had a little time to prepare for this momentous interview; but at such an important crisis he durst not play the coward; nervous as he felt himself to be when he was ushered into the proprietor's room, he was none the less determined to give as good an account of himself as he could.

Fortunately this Dr. Gillespie—a little, pink-complexioned, silvery-haired man, rather foppishly dressed—did not seem a forbidding person; nay, from over his gold-rimmed spectacles he looked in rather a kindly fashion at the new-comer, when the necessary introduction and explanation had been made.

"So you are 'Fairfax'?" he said. "'Fairfax' writes well, when he has a good subject: you are not always equally fortunate, perhaps. And if I may speak generally, I sometimes think there's a little too much hill and sky in your compositions. 'The proper study of mankind is man,' you know."

"He was a pretty poor specimen who said that," responded Gilchrist—for even in his desperate solicitude he must needs stand up for his opinions and his practice. "And these essays, Dr. Gillespie—these rambling, out-of-door essays—are merely a record of personal likings, and the impressions of the moment; they don't pretend to be anything; and really, if it comes to be a matter of personal liking, I confess I would rather look at a range of hills than at a crowd of men. The hills would interest me more. They are more beautiful: they make better companions; they are silent—"

"Not so the extremely profanum vulgus, you would say," interposed the Doctor, with a bit of a laugh. "Ah, well, we need not discuss the question; for if you take this post, your own writings would only come in as *parerga;* they would be no necessary part of your duties—"

It was at this moment that Tom Grieve judged it becoming to retire: he foresaw that the topic of salary was imminent.

"The fact is," continued the Doctor, "I propose leaving the entire editorial control in the hands of Mr. Grieve. I know of no one better fitted for the position—except in one small particular. He is rather deficient on the classical side; I frankly tell you so—for he would just as frankly admit it. For instance, last week there came a Letter to the Editor signed 'Davus sum'; and perhaps in haste or inadvertence Mr. Grieve prefixed the usual formula; so that in the paper the signature appeared as 'I am, yours, etc., Davus sum.' Now I should like to have someone in the office who could keep an eye on such little mishaps as these—someone with a more general education and intelligence than the ordinary printers' reader; for we are supposed to be a literary paper: and it is annoying to find Goethe changed into Goëthe, or some such phrase as *vademeca* staring at you, when you open the pages at breakfast on Saturday morning."

Here Gilchrist had to protest that he was no philological encyclopædia: but he added that if a diligent use of dictionaries could guard against these errors, he thought he could manage. And in brief the terms of the agreement were amicably arranged: he was to begin his duties the very next morning; his hours were to be such as best suited himself and his work—except that on Friday night he would be expected to remain in the office until the paper was sent to press; and the remuneration for this entrancing labour of love was to be no less than thirty shillings a week. How he bade good-by to the estimable Doctor—who was hurrying off to the Nairn links; how he managed to re-discover the sub-editor's room, to express his gratitude; and how he

got out into the grey thoroughfares of Invernish, he probably did not know: he might have said, with the goodwife in Jean Adams's ballad, 'I'm downright dizzy wi' the thought—in troth, I'm like to greet.' And amid all this tumult and bewilderment of joy, what should he do but make straight away for the Post-office, to send a sixpenny telegram to Dingwall!

Sweet, sweet was the air in this Church-street of Invernish, as he sped quickly along: for to him it was an intoxicating atmosphere of liberty, and courage, and hope. Now definitely he could assure himself that he was no longer a slave and a drudge; he had entered on a profession—a profession that to his thinking was the noblest in the world. For what thing nobler could there be than the education of public opinion, that in its turn assumes the guidance of private conduct, that safeguards the national honour at home and abroad, and that keeps steadily on securing further and further enactments for the general well-being of the community? What thing nobler could there be than the curbing of the oppressor, the defence of the weak, the cultivation of patriotism, the spreading of knowledge and tolerance and amity among the peoples of the earth? No doubt here and there one could find a journalist who disgraced his calling; a devil's spawn of a creature, insensate and irresponsible in his malignity and envious hate; a secret assassin of reputations; perhaps even a hired and paid bravo. But the great mass of these myriad newspaper-voices—so this youthful enthusiast believed, at least—made for the betterment of mankind; there was a constant, if slow, amelioration in progress; the thoughts of men were being widened, towards charity and a fairer

comprehension of each other's wants and aims. And he was proud to think that he also, in this obscure little corner of the universe, in his quiet way, might help. His heart was at this moment full of goodwill towards everybody. He resolved that if the "White Cockade" lass were to attack him again (as she was very likely to do) with her wicked flouts and jeers, he would not even endeavour to reply; her jibes and laughter, her Cavaliers and Jacobites might rule the roast if so it pleased her. And then again he reflected—as he was going into the Post-office—that if Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig should by chance meet him in any one of these Invernish thoroughfares, and if she should honour him by the slightest nod of recognition, then no longer would he have to raise his hat to her with an inward and burning sense of shame. For no longer was he a clerk in Struthers's shop.

CHAPTER XI.

A MORNING CALL.

But not all at once was Archie Gilchrist emancipated from that terrible sense of serfdom that had eaten so deep into both body and soul. His nights were haunted. He dreamed that he had overslept himself by hours; that he was rushing with the keys in his hand along the streets of Invernish, in a vain effort to be in time; that the workmen were standing idly about the back entrance, jeering at him for having given them so much of an unexpected holiday. He dreamed that a stock-book, to be filled up by himself alone, had been added to the

other books already so much in arrear; and the hopelessness of the task lay like a weight of lead on him, never to be removed. He dreamed that again he was being browbeaten and bullied by the little red-headed spitfire, Struthers, before all the other people in the shop, until in a madness of despair and rage he dashed an inkpot in the petty tyrant's face. Then again he could not sleep after four o'clock; but that was not much of a hardship; for he was more eager than ever after the acquisition of all attainable knowledge; and morning after morning found him strolling slowly and thoughtfully out to the solitude of the Islands, his book in his hands, around him the ever-new and strange and wonderful mystery of the dawn. The odd thing was that when the time did come for him to get to work, he felt ashamed. This was not work at all; this was play—and play of the most delightful kind. What could be more fascinating than to sit at a table and go through the monthly magazines, snipping out attractive passages, and prefixing his own critical (mostly approving) comments? Tom Grieve, who ought to have been his master, was nothing but a goodnatured and considerate, if sometimes sardonic, companion. With no work, then, and no master, how could he accept his weekly salary and yet preserve a conscience free from compunction? On the rare occasions on which he met Dr. Gillespie in Union-street, he felt impelled to go up to him and say, "Can't you give me something more to do? I am not earning that money. If you like, I'll go out to Nairn with you, and carry your clubs for you all day on the links, and at night I can get through with my newspaper-work." But generally the Doctor would stop and say a

kindly word or two, pointing in the very opposite direction. "You must not neglect your parerga, Mr. Gilchrist, among your mechanical duties. We cannot be responsible for putting Pegasus in chains, you know." Chains? There were no chains! Instead there was a sense of freedom almost deliriously intoxicating, only that always there remained an undercurrent of fear that it could not possibly be deserved, and that it could not possibly last.

But if this labourer was so desperately anxious to prove himself worthy of his hire, there was now, and suddenly, sprung upon him a task from which he shrank back with something of dismay.

"Gilchrist," said Tom Grieve, knitting his brows over a proof, "I wish you would do me a service."

"Of course, then!" he answered—only too glad to have the chance.

"I think your 'White Cockade' friend is as rambling and discursive as yourself," continued the sub-editor; "and this time she has managed to drag in some moralisings about science and religion that would frighten many decent folk into fits. I don't like to cut out the passage; for amateurs are always sensitive; and besides, she's a fiery-tempered young wretch—at least, there's plenty of devil-may-care about her; and as likely as not she would go straight to the Doctor, and challenge him; and the Doctor is just daft about her; he would be down on me with a snubbing, without looking at the paper at all. Now if you would go and see her personally, and explain, and ask her to delete this passage herself: these things are so much more easily arranged by word of mouth than by letter—"

"You want me to go and call on Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig?" said Archie Gilchrist.

"Yes," proceeded the sub-editor, not observing any consternation. "And reason with her: talk to her like a father: tell her there's no use frightening decent, quiet bodies—"

"Will you show me what it is you object to?"

Grieve handed over the proof, on which there was marked a passage which ran thus:

"The philosopher hath said in his heart, There is no unjust suffering: it is only a disguised benevolence. And so a passing carpenter has his head cut open by a slate falling from a roof; he is carried to the hospital, where he endures immeasurable agony; he is incapacitated from work, and his wife and family are reduced to starvation. But if there were no unjust suffering, if the world were run on terms of strictly retributive punishment, the slate should have fallen not on the head of the carpenter but on the head of the careless slater who left it loose. The benevolence is so much disguised that, when one thinks of the carpenter's starving children, it looks remarkably like blind cruelty. No, no; if the existence of pain is a mystery, let it remain so; let us accept it as we accept other mysteries, with such faith in the divine goodness as is possible to us, according to our temperament and training; but do not let us have pseudo-science come in, with sentimental fudge about evolution being a kindly process. Evolution may work its will; and the devil may take the hindmost; but we cannot have our scientific guides persuade us they can introduce into their theory of the conduct of the universe any secret intention of benevolence; nor can we

have them try to convince us that human suffering is necessarily merited by the person who suffers. Because such is not the case."

Gilchrist smiled to himself: this young lady, whether her reasoning were coherent or not, could hit out. But he turned to Tom Grieve.

"Why, what's the harm in this?" he exclaimed. "She's on the side of the angels!"

"I am not learned in metapheesics," retorted the sub-editor, peevishly. "What I do know is that questions of that kind, whatever side she is on, are not fitted for a paper like ours; and I want you to tell her so, in as roundabout way as you can, and get her to cut out the passage of her own accord. And you'd better wait and see it done."

Well, this was a command from his superior officer; and he was not one to shirk service; so he put the proof in an envelope, and put the envelope in his pocket, and presently he was on his way to Glengarva House. He did not pause to ask himself whether this was a proper hour of the day to call upon a young lady; probably he did not know; in any case his mind was filled with other cares, for he could not but regard this delicate task he had undertaken with anything but a vague apprehension. "White Cockade" was such a desperately sarcastic young woman, as he gathered from her writings; and he knew that his manners were uncouth; perhaps even speech might fail him. No matter: he must do his duty to the paper that had befriended him in his extremest need; and so he set forth—with his heart in his mouth.

At this same point of time Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave was standing on the raised embankment over-

looking the river—standing rather jauntily, her arms akimbo, her shoulders thrown back, her light summer clothing and a brisk southerly breeze conspiring to reveal the perfect outlines of her slim and symmetrical figure. In her face there was apparent a most friendly interest; for she was following a game of foot-ball that was being played by a band of young ragamuffins on the space of greensward just beneath her, between the footpath and the edge of the stream. They had no right to come there; and she could have got a perpetual injunction against them; but she liked small boys, even when the tatterdemalions had neither bonnets for their head nor shoes or stockings for their feet; and she had grown tolerant of their cursing and swearing, their continual quarrelling, and, what was still worse, their atrocious Low-country dialect and accent. It is true she did not understand the game: she could not make out, for example, why a player should try to bump the descending ball with his head; and then again her very spine shivered when she saw one or other of them kick that hard leather thing with his bare toes. But at least she surmised that the two bundles of jackets heaped on the grass represented the two goals; and she greatly enjoyed anything in the shape of a scrimmage; and sometimes she regretted that the wooden fence of the embankment intervened between her and these young rascals, for she would like to have lent a hand. She was to lend a hand, on this particular morning, in an unexpected fashion.

For at length the game or series of games had come to an end, the losing side angry and scowling, the winning side indulging in taunts and jeers. But the most

sullen of all the losers was also the oldest of the gang, a big, hulking lout of fourteen or fifteen who was known as Pate; and when Pate had put on his jacket, he all of a sudden gave way to the rage that was boiling within him, and straightway he fell upon a very small boy (goal-keeper, she guessed he was) and began to pummel him most mercilessly. The small boy simply threw himself on the ground, howling and crying, and vainly trying to shelter himself by clasping his hands round the back of his neck. This performance did not last long. With an incredible swiftness Eelin had sped away from her post of observation, had got round by the laurels, had got out by the gate, and was on the young ruffian ere he knew. She gripped him by the scruff of the neck, and hauled him off the small boy. Then she hit him a skelp on one side of the head. Then she hit him a skelp on the other side of the head. Then, as he retreated, she advanced upon him, still more vengeful and threatening.

"You sneak and bully!" she said, in a blaze of indignation.

But this retreat of his had not been without a purpose; for behind him there was a bed of shingle; and the next instant he had picked up one of the largest of the stones. He dared not hurl it at her face, for her fearless eyes confronted him; but he hurled it at her all the same, and savagely; and it struck her knee, so that a fire of agony seemed to shoot through her frame. Then, seeing that she involuntarily halted, he picked up another stone; and that also he was about to hurl at her——

But this was not Pate's day; this day there was n

luck for Pate. Before he could throw the second stone he was unexpectedly attacked from the rear; his collar and another portion of his attire were seized by two powerful hands: and in another moment he found himself heaved into space—the short parabola he described ending in the shallows of the river Nish, whence he emerged spluttering and shaking his rags. Then the tall young man with the masses of shaggy flaxen hair, who had in this brusque fashion interposed in the strife, turned to the more attractive of the two combatants.

"If I had a stick," he said, "I would thrash a lesson into that scoundrel. I hope he has not hurt you, Miss Macdonald——"

"Oh, no, not at all!" she said, with a little twitch of her lips.

"I have a message to you from Mr. Grieve, if you can give me a couple of minutes."

She tried to answer him civilly: but what her heart was calling aloud was this: "Oh, do go away! Won't you go away! Won't you turn your face away! I am not crying. I am not a coward. I am not hurt. If there's water in my eyes it isn't because I'm crying. I am not a coward. If you would only go away, I could limp into the house and lie down."

Well, she was not a coward; for she managed somehow to conceal the tearfulness of her eyes: and right bravely did she ask him if he would not come indoors in order to explain what Mr. Grieve wanted; and after the first step or two she found that her knee did not pain her so much after all. So he followed her into the house, and she led the way into the beautiful drawing-room, with its ferns and flowers, its dainty colours of

decoration, its French windows surrounded by honeysuckle and hanging and swaying roses. To him it appeared a kind of fairyland; and surely no mortal ever entered fairyland with more of perturbation.

And yet, when he had with uncertain fingers taken the envelope from his pocket, and almost before he had fully conveyed to her the purport of his mission, she at once tried to relieve him from his too obvious confusion. She laughed the whole thing away with the utmost good-humour. She even offered to draw her pen right down the entire column.

"No, I won't do that," she said, correcting herself; "for Mr. Grieve might think I was offended. And I'm not. Do I look as if I was offended? I will cut out just whatever you please; and perhaps you could show me how best to do it."

He had considered that question, too; and when she had brought over pen and ink and blotting-paper, he pointed out to her how the dangerous passage could be excised without destroying the continuity of the article; and as he discovered she was not familiar with printers' terms and marks and usages, he directed her how to "delete" and "run on," and so forth. In the midst of this engaging occupation the Bean-an-Tighearn made her appearance, wearing a light lace shawl over her head and shoulders, for she had been out in the garden talking with old Maxwell, For a moment she certainly looked surprised; but why should she have been astonished at any new freak on the part of Wild Eelin?

"Mother, dear," said the young lady, with great coolness, "Mr. Gilchrist has been instructing me in all sorts of curious things; and I've taken up so much of his time

that I think we'd better ask him to give us a little more of it and stay to lunch. It's close on one o'clock."

The young man had risen to his feet, and bowed; he would presume no further than that, though he had been introduced to her on a previous occasion; but she on her part went forward to him with a most winning and gracious politeness, and gave him her hand for a moment, and said, "Oh, yes, I hope you will stay and lunch with us, Mr. Gilchrist." He would gladly have sacrificed a thousand pounds, had he had it, to have escaped from this dilemma; but he could not; some native instinct told him that it would be too great a discourtesy to refuse; and so, with what thanks he could muster, he accepted, and his hostess went and rang the bell and gave certain directions to one of the maids.

Now what followed was for Archie Gilchrist all a bewilderment and a consuming anxiety. He knew that pitfalls surrounded him, and that at any moment he might stumble to his destruction. To begin with, he was haunted by the consciousness that he had committed an initial blunder in calling at an untoward hour; he had intruded upon these people just as they were about to begin their midday meal. Then the clothes he wore: a work-a-day suit was all very well in the *Observer* office; he had never thought of the matter in coming away; but he did think of it, and desperately, now that he was about to sit down at table with the two ladies of the House of Kinvaig. At this moment a gong sounded. Mrs. Macdonald and her daughter rose to cross the room, and he considered he could not do better than follow them humbly: the next thing he became aware of was that he had allowed his hostess to open the door

for herself; and his heart burned with a bitter shame and mortification. Then again he had brought his hat into the drawing-room with him; so far he deemed he was safe; but now was he to leave it in the hall, or carry it into the dining-room, and place it under his chair? Merciful Heavens (he said to himself, when he caught sight of the laid-out table) should he have to carve? A wild-duck, for example?—and he had never been able to discover how the legs or wings of that animal were jointed into its infamous body. However, matters resolved themselves somehow; he found himself seated with his two companions; he accepted a piece of cold salmon offered him by one of the maidservants; and through a blessed inspiration he hit upon the idea that the silver knife and fork before him, not the steel ones, were the proper implements. In the distraction of this first minute or two, he was very nearly driven into a frank and honest apology. He was very nearly saying to her: 'Madam, as you see, I am quite unacquainted with the usages of good society; and perhaps I made a mistake in accepting your kind invitation; but I hope you will forgive me if I do or say anything wrong, and attribute it to ignorance, and not to presumption."

He did not know Eelin's mother. From the moment she saw that the young man was embarrassed and nervous she set herself to put him at his ease; and this she did in a hundred little ways, with extraordinary gentleness and tact. For instance, when he was being helped to anything, her eyes were always called away somewhere else; so that if any trifling mishap occurred, it would pass without notice. Of course he was not an absolute savage. He knew to break bread with his

hands, not his teeth; he kept his knife away from his mouth; he did not use his pocket-handkerchief where his table-napkin was more appropriately called for. But now the fun was about to begin.

For Miss Eelin also had noticed that he was sensitive and apprehensive; and she thought the best way she could come to his aid was to attack him boldly and put him on his mettle.

"So, Mr. 'Fairfax,'" said she, with gay effrontery, "I see you still quote with approval 'For a' that and a' that.'"

"Why not?" said he. "It is the poor man's Declaration of Independence."

"It is the poor man's Declaration of Impudence!" she retorted. "I am certain there never was any piece written that has done so much harm to the character of the people of Scotland, among the less-educated classes, at all events. It is nothing but an outpouring of mean and envious rancour. And look at the false assumptions, from end to end of it! Is it true that poverty is always so strictly honest, and always so sturdily independent? Is it true that a lord must necessarily be a birkie?—whatever a birkie may be: I'm sure I don't know. 'Wha struts and stares and a' that;' did you ever see a lord strut and stare? My small experience of people of rank is that they carry courtesy and modesty and self-effacement almost to an extreme: it is the vulgar upstart who asserts himself, and brags of his 'worth,' and inwardly hates anyone who is better born or better educated than himself. 'Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine': and so those who wear silk must necessarily be fools; and those who drink wine must necessarily be knaves;

and it is conceded that there are no fools and no knaves among the proletariat."

"Eelin, Eelin!" remonstrated her mother. "Why so argumentative? Mr. Gilchrist is not contesting anything you say."

"But I may," said he grimly, "when Miss Macdonald has finished."

"Then see how Burns ate his own words," continued the intrepid young mischief-maker, "when he had been invited to dine with Lord Daer. He writes exultingly about the honour done him, and he describes his astonishment at finding his Lordship quite a modest gentleman—"the fient a pride, nae pride had he." However, among all the mean and jealous imputations and self-conscious swagger of 'A man's a man for a' that,' there is one good couplet. 'The rank is but the guinea stamp. The man's the gowd for a' that.' That is an excellent conceit—quite admirable. It seems a pity it should occur almost word for word in Wycherley's *Plain Dealer;* and Gavin Hamilton was just the sort of person to have a volume of Wycherley's plays in his house."

This reprehensible stratagem of hers succeeded to perfection—for what Scotchman can sit silent and hear Scotland's great peasant poet attacked?—and soon Archie Gilchrist had forgotten all about knife and plate and table-napkin and the ministrations of the maidservants, in his endeavour to combat this pert young iconoclast, and set her down. She took her punishment with the sweetest good-nature; and then she dexterously led him away into other fields of literature; and by this time all his shamefacedness had departed from him; he was at home in this conversation; he was talking of that he

knew. And she induced him to tell them of his brief newspaper-experiences; and evinced much curiosity about the relations existing between Dr. Gillespie and Mr. Grieve and himself; while the Bean-an-Tighearn was always interested in anything that appeared to interest her daughter. When, in due course, after having had coffee in the drawing-room, he rose to leave, both ladies accompanied him to the door, and both were kind enough to ask him to call again and see them, when he chanced to have an idle afternoon. Then they returned to their couch-seat by the open window looking out on the lawn.

"Well, Eelin, you do pick up the strangest acquaintances," the elder woman said—but not reproachfully: there was not an ounce of reproach in her nature.

"Mother, I've told you before," responded the young lady, "you must not judge geniuses like him and me by ordinary standards. We are a law unto ourselves. And what have you to say against the young man with the lion's head of hair?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. He seems well-informed; and he was neither pretentious nor opinionated; and sometimes he forgot his shyness so far as to laugh. Oh, I have nothing to say against him; in fact, he rather interests me—"

"Mother, you shall become his patron!" the girl exclaimed. "You will have rescued a youthful genius from neglect; and the world will ring with your discovery. But as for this other genius—that's me—there will be no such luck." She sighed. "What is the use of being beautiful, and virtuous, and accomplished, and a genius as well, if you are unappreciated? When I sink into an

early grave, you will all be sorry; but it will be too late then—"

"Eelin!"

The word was a cry of pain.

"What is it, Mummie?"—and in an instant her arms were round her mother's neck; and cheek was touching cheek.

"Don't say things like that, even in jest," she pleaded. "You don't know, Eelin—but they go through my heart like a knife."

"Well, then, I won't, Mummie; I won't indeed. And now come away into the garden," she continued, with all her usual audacity of cheerfulness, "and help me to get a basket of fruit for Mr. Alan Macdonald; and I'll take it along to him myself; and I'll have to sit and listen to rhapsodies about his wonderful son, the railway-king. The wonderful son!—I imagine the wonderful son has a pretty good idea of his importance in the world! However, he was respectful to you, Mummie; and I want to be kind to his father—the poor old blind man!—and if there's only one ripe apricot left in the garden, I know where it's going!"

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE BRAE POOL.

It was a wild morning in Glengarva—wild and dark and stormy; the occasional swift bursts of sunlight and the pervading and portentous glooms changing with the ever-changing landscape; fierce squalls from the mountainous regions in the west hurling down the strath, so

that if the sturdy pines only groaned, and shivered, and straightened themselves again, the more fragile birches were blown and tossed about in every direction; while the slopes of heather, bending before the successive gusts, were like running waves. The river Garva, after the heavy rains of the night, galloped along in full spate; the tawny yellowish-white masses of water boiling and tumbling into the Rock Pool; but in the confined Narrows the current ran red, with long streaks of froth on its solid surface. Hither and thither went fluctuations of softened sounds, filling all the air: sometimes the long moan of the beaten and waving branches seemed to rise paramount in the gale; and then again that would partially cease, and the altered wind would bring with it the confused and half-melodious thunder of the distant falls.

Into the sombre day there came a spot of vivid colour; it was as if some tropical bird, some parrakeet, had suddenly appeared in this Highland wilderness when Lady Mountmahon stepped forth from the hall-door of Kinvaig House, her morning-gown of a brilliant grass-green satin, her Balmoral bonnet, with its eagle's plume, of a flaming rose-red, to say nothing of the canary hue of her hair and the too obvious and alien carnations of her cheeks. But if her ladyship was in gay attire, her temper was far from gay; her brows were impatient and sulky and angry as she glanced up and down the empty glen; and when at length she started off for the river, she had not a word for the poor little French poodle, Tartarin, that trotted submissively at her heels. For the rest, she carried a blotting-book under her arm; and into

her waist-belt she had stuck one of those pens that are furnished with a supply of ink.

She found her husband seated on a rough and steep bank overlooking the deepest part of the Brae Pool; and he was staring in a dull and aimless and besotted fashion at the heavy current that was roaring along and at the smoother water of an eddy that was just underneath his feet. He took no notice of her approach.

"Look here, Mounty," she said—and she spoke with a certain sharpness to make herself heard above the din of the flood, "are you going to sign this cheque or are you not?"

"Oh, go to the devil!" he said—and he resumed his hypnotic staring.

For a moment mortification held her silent; but presently her tongue was let loose on him.

"No, there's only the one way of screwing money out of *you;* and that's getting you into a mortal funk. Do you think I don't know why you keep those brutes and bullies up at the inn, feeding them on the fat of the land, and pampering them, and squandering bank-notes among them? Well I know! It's because you daren't call your soul your own. They're up to your games; they could peach; they could get you warned off every race-course in the country; and if you tried to cheek it out with them, they'd just take you and batter the life out of your body. You pretend to laugh at them; you pretend you have them here to amuse your guests; but you're shaking in your shoes all the time; when you get them by themselves, you fawn and cringe and toady: there's no difficulty when *they* want a cheque signed—a lot of drunken and brawling beasts!—"

"Oh, go to the devil!" again remarked the podgy and pasty-faced young man; and he continued his gloomy contemplation of the racing red stream and the deep black eddy with its fringe of saffron-tinted foam.

"And how do you suppose I can run this house without a farthing of money?" she went on, her voice becoming every moment more raucous. "If it was some idiotic whim of your own you would fling away thousands; if it was to secure you a gluttonous dish you could eat all by yourself, you would spend ten thousand pounds on it: but when it comes to paying the tradespeople of Invernish, or a milliner's bill, or a wine-merchant's bill, there's not a sixpence to be screwed out of you. And every man-jack of the crowd you've got together here expecting to be served with the best—no matter whether they were born in Ratcliffe Highway or not! What are they here for, I wonder!—lying in bed all day, and letting the keepers go up the hill to get game for the kitchen. As for a salmon—here we are on the banks of a salmon-river; and look at the fishmonger's bill from week to week. Well, I'm sick of it. I'm sick of housekeeping when you're ashamed to look a tradesman in the face. Dawes and Mrs. Ramsden can do it between them: and you can amuse yourself by cursing them when things go wrong. There's not another woman in my position in England who would trouble her head about such things—and for such thanks! Why should I care what dinners are gorged by the crew you've collected here?—the riff-raff of the music-halls—"

"What were you yourself?" he said, contemptuously.

"When I was at the halls, I had some self-respect left," said she, unabashed, "and it's precious little of that I've got now. Well, I've had enough of it this time. You can let Dawes and Ramsden swindle you right and left: why should I care a hang? And if I can't get money to pay fair and square, then I know how it's to be got; oh, yes, I do: don't you mistake; all the money I need for myself I can get; and you, and your establishments, and your music-hall mugs, and your prize-fighting pals, the whole lot of you may go to——"

She was just about to indicate the direction in which they might proceed, when unfortunately, at this very moment, the French poodle happened to jostle against his lordship's legs. An angry foot was shot out; poor Tartarin was precipitated down the bank; and the next moment it was splashing about in the back eddy, helplessly beating the surface with its forepaws, and if anything rather receding from than returning to the shore. With shriek after shriek her ladyship flew to the rescue of her darling; she tried to reach out to it with her blotting-book, and failed; she frantically called to it, but it seemed to have no power to direct its movements; it only splashed and splashed with its paws, and every second it was drifting nearer and nearer to the full volume of the spate, that would inevitably whirl it away to perdition. The mistress of the luckless animal perceived this danger clearly enough; she saw that her calling and calling from this part of the bank was of no avail; and so, as a last desperate resource, she rushed round the top of the eddy and made her way along a spit of loose shingle that here ran out into the stream; and again she tried to get near the drowning dog.

What happened next had little to do with the poor lost Tartarin.

For this spit of shingle, swept and saturated by the rush of the river, was nothing less than a quicksand; and as she had not hesitated to plunge some way into the water, in her despairing efforts to recover her pet, she all at once found her footing giving way beneath her. The blear-eyed and bemused young man lying supine on the bank, who had been watching the fate of the doomed Tartarin with a certain obscure feeling of satisfied revenge, began to think that something else was occurring out there. Why did she scream in that unnatural fashion? Why had she turned her face to the land; and why did she wildly grasp and clutch, while all the time she appeared to be sinking and sinking deeper in that black hole? And then the two arms thrown up?—what did it all mean? Good Heavens, she had gone—the lapping black eddy and the wide, roaring river beyond were alike a blank! And even yet, in his stupor and amazement, he did not fully comprehend. But when, in another moment or so, some portion of her clothing and a struggling hand and head had reappeared on the surface some way further down; when he saw the next minute that the fierce red current had got hold of her and was sweeping her onward; when he heard a piteous cry—as it were a last cry of farewell—then of a sudden he seemed to become as one mad. He tore along the foot of the steep bank, over rocks and through bracken and brier and pendulous birch branches; and ever he kept calling to her; and then again he would distractedly shout and shout for help—his voice ringing far away and over the multitudinous

lashings and surgings of the stream. And then his foot caught in a twig; at the speed at which he was going he could not recover himself; he pitched heavily forward, striking his skull on a stone; and for the present he knew no more.

When he came to himself, there was an old shepherd kneeling by him, and he felt something cold bound about his brow.

"Where is she?—where is she?" he said, as eagerly as his dazed condition would permit.

"Down at the foot of the Brae, your lordship," said the grey-haired shepherd, with a solemnity that the younger man had not the wit to perceive.

"Ah, that's right!—that's right! Come away and show me!" he said, hastily; and he began to scramble blindly along by the boulders and through the undergrowth of weeds and bushes. "What an escape! Poor Carrie! I will shoot that d——d dog if it ever turns up again!" he kept muttering to himself, as he pursued his way: and then he stopped short, and faced round. "Who got her out of the water?" he demanded.

"Me and the bit laddie that was with me," replied the shepherd. "I've sent him up to the House to tell them, your lordship."

"I know you," Mountmahon said, peering at him. "You're one of Sir Charles Orme's shepherds. You're the shepherd up at Lochletter. Well, now, my ancient friend, let me tell you this has been a good day for you —a rattling good day! I'll buy a farm for you: burn me in —— if I don't! I'll buy a farm for you, and I'll stock it from end to end, and I'll put money to your name at the bank——" and therewith he rapped out a

number of oaths invoking curses upon himself if he failed to keep his word.

"It would be more seemly, your lordship," said the old man, in grave accents, "if ye would use ither language than that when ye are so near the presence of the dead."

He uttered a cry.

"What is that you mean?—what is that?" he said, as if he could not realise what the words meant; and then he turned and went quickly on again; and presently there came in sight a strange object lying still and motionless on the space of greensward between the end of the Brae and the river-bank. He took to running now—for the way was more open. His arms were stretched out in front of him. "Carrie!" he cried. "Carrie! Carrie!" And when he had reached that heap of sodden finery—and the pallid features—and the poor limp hands—he threw himself at full length beside the dead body, with howls of self-pity, and ejaculations and appeals, and he passed an arm under her head to raise it, and he pushed back the wet hair from her face.

"Carrie! Carrie!" he called aloud, in a quite demented fashion. "Carrie, come back to me. Listen! —listen! The doctors will bring you through; the doctors will put you all right; I'll have the best in Scotland, if it costs me fifty thousand pounds! Carrie, can't you hear me! Open your eyes a bit! Carrie, pull yourself together, old lass: you never wanted for courage!" And then he turned to the shepherd. "Away, man, away to the House and tell them!" he cried, in passionate incoherence. "It's doctors I want—we'll save her yet—run, man, run—tell them the waggonette—no, the dog-

cart—gallop every mile into Invergarva—and telegraph —telegraph—telegraph! For the love of God, man, telegraph!—telegraph!—it's doctors I want—fifty thousand pounds to hear her speak a single word—run, man, run!"

"I have sent to the House, your lordship," said the shepherd. "Your lordship's friends will be here directly."

"Friends?—I never had any friend but her!" he cried, bursting into tears. "She is the only friend I ever had!" and again he flung himself prone beside her, with moans of anguish, and he smoothed the wet hair, and kissed the pale lips, and held her cold hand in his two hot ones, as if he would convey some life to her that way. When the men arrived from Kinvaig House, he had blubbered and sobbed himself into a state of utter exhaustion; he let them do with him what they liked; he protested no longer; he clung no longer to his frantic make-believe; he seemed dazed, and listless, and appeared hardly to know what was going on.

And then, in silence, and with every mark of respect, they placed the body on the litter they had brought with them; and there was a sheet, too, to cover her over, so that the poor, pitiful finery ceased to flaunt itself; and in this manner they slowly set out for Kinvaig House. And this was the dirge pronounced by the chief mourner, he walking at the foot of the litter, and not heeding whether his maudlin and self-commiserating utterances were overheard or no:

"She was the one that stood by me. She was the one that looked to my interests. The rest of them would have sponged me out of house and home, and robbed

me right and left; but she kept staunch to me. If she had stood in with some of them, she might have made a pretty penny for herself—the baccarat nights, when there was a glass of fizz going—she might have made a pretty purse for herself; but she stood by me; she was too sharp for them; she would have chucked the whole gang rather than see me done. From the moment I took her from the halls and married her, she was true to me. She was honest to the bone. She looked after my interests first of all; and the skylarking was only to pass the time. If I had been as stoney-broke as a stable-lad gone wrong she'd have weighed in with her wedding-ring—that she would! And game she was: who would try to cheek her? Not one! They knew better —the whole crew of them. Carrie Milton—Carrie—all the fellows swore by her—a gay time it was. And now, poor wretch—for the sake of an infernal little devil of a dog: burn me in —— if I don't have him hanged to a tree if ever he turns up again! No shooting: a rope and a branch of a tree: and then he can kick his devil's dance in the air! And what is to happen to me now that Carrie Milton has left me! It's all over with me now! I give in. I'm finished. Carrie was the one to back me up. This will break me all to pieces. I'm no use now. Carrie was the one to stand by me—"

And so, with recurrent sobbing, and with tears running down his flabby cheeks, he continued these maunderings and self-pityings until the sad little procession reached Kinvaig House. The women of the party, frightened, hung back in the hall; but the men-roysterers came out to offer forced and awkward expressions of sympathy. He did not even regard them. He made his way through

them; and went into the empty dining-room; and rang for his valet.

"Hutchins," he said, when that prim-looking person appeared, "champagne—and plenty of it. I will lie down here for awhile. Keep them out. Plenty of champagne—I am broken to bits."

He threw himself on to a sofa by the window, and the valet, leaving the room, was absent only a minute or two; when he returned, he was accompanied by the butler, who brought with him a tray and a couple of bottles of champagne and a glass, which with much ceremony he placed on a small table near the head of the couch.

"Steele, go away," Mountmahon said, peevishly. And then he struggled up, and drank two or three glasses of champagne, one directly after the other; and then he let his head fall back on the cushion. "Hutchins," he said, "I can't stop in this house. I'm not up to it. It would kill me. My nerves are gone." He drank some more champagne. "I can't stay in this house. As soon as I've had an hour or two's sleep, I will go off to Invernish. I shall be at the Station Hotel. Tell Dawes he must attend to the funeral. And send a message up to the inn, that I want Phillips and O'Rourke to come with me to Invernish. I'm not fit to look after myself. No—not you: only Phillips and O'Rourke. Have my things packed. And the waggonette about four." He managed to swallow still some more champagne; and again the short-cropped bullet head, with the pasty complexion now considerably flushed, and the gooseberry eyes all congested, fell back on the cushion. "Go away now, Hutchins," he said, somewhat drowsily. "I won't see

anybody when I leave for Invernish. Not a soul. Tell them to go to the devil. Dawes will attend to the funeral —no use bothering me—everything right and proper—as swagger as he likes—everything right and proper—never mind the cost—never mind the—never mind—"

Then there was silence; and Hutchins noiselessly withdrew; for his lordship was asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

FROM the top of the Castle hill at Invernish, it is possible for one to discern—far away in the south, beyond the most distant undulations of the ever-receding landscape—it is possible for one to discern the square towers and little corner turrets of Westminster Abbey; but then there are conditions; to behold that incorporeal vision one must have the pulsating blood of four-and-twenty, and the imagination of a poet, and a brain all afire with wild schemes and dreams. Any ordinary mortal—not being a newly-emancipated draper's clerk, with vehement ambitions and wistful eyes—would on this particular morning have noticed nothing out of the common, except, perhaps, that the wide-stretching country looked unusually fresh and cheerful after the heavy rain of the night. For already, at this early hour, the skies had entirely cleared; the azure dome was without a speck of cloud; the trees were basking in the welcome warmth; and the blue river raced down between its vividly green banks, washing high along the grass, be-

cause of the swollen current. But those twin towers, spectral and pale, that rose above the dim horizon—silvery-grey they were, and ethereal, and ghost-like—appearing far away behind the wooded uplands, and far away behind the films of ultramarine that spoke of the mountains ranged about Glen Urquhart and Balmacaan: well, who but one of all the inhabitants of Invernish could summon up those phantasmal structures? And what lay between Archie Gilchrist and the famous shrine that seemed to stand at the very world's end? Why, at the best and happiest, nothing less than the desperate struggle of a lifetime, with all the chances of breakdown, and failure, and bitter renunciation. But then, if there were success? If one could add one's name to the proud roll of England's writers? Other prizes might go to other men, and welcome: love, wealth, power, even the self-gratification of philanthropy—he coveted none of these; but to sleep through the centuries with the mighty dead, surely that were no ignoble rest, and in the meantime no ignoble aim, though one's existence were burnt up by the flame of it. The foolish lad!—someone ought to have told him to go back to his gallipots—or at least to his gum-pot, and his pair of scissors, and his snipping of paragraphs. But these early morning rambles, when he seemed as it were to have all the universe to himself, were strange and solitary things; and perhaps his head had been a little bit turned by his recent promotion; and after a night of persistent rain sometimes the air is astonishingly pure, so that quite impossibly distant objects may come within the sphere of one's sight. Westminster Abbey—for a recently-liberated draper's clerk? The madness of the desire was pathetic

in its way. And this young man, with all his passionate hopes and bewildering aspirations, was very much alone.

And the divine mystery and wonder of love: was that also to be renounced—to be cut out of the perfervid imaginings of a youth of four-and-twenty? Yes, that also. The imaginings of a youth of four-and-twenty are rapid and eager; he had already constructed for himself the tragedy of his life: in his outlook how could there be aught else than tragedy? The "*belle dame sans merci*" had smiled upon him, to his undoing; and she was free to work her will with him; and he would not complain. He indulged in no illusions. He was not likely to go to the poor old woman living up at Dingwall, and say to her: "Mother, my worldly wealth consists of thirty shillings a week and a cartload of idle chimeras; nevertheless Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig has consented to marry me; and don't you think you should be proud of such a daughter?" On the other hand, when Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig, having amused herself for awhile with this young newspaper man, should send him to the right about, would he howl and rage and call for revenge? Not at all. There was no trace of that arch-ingrate, Claude Melnotte, in the nature of the Invernish youth. Why, he had already foreshadowed what was to happen to him and her in these hopeless circumstances; and the foreshadowing had naturally taken the shape of a bit of verse, for four-and-twenty likes to talk to itself in that way. He had even been at the trouble of dotting the final e's, so that when his pathetic piece should hereafter come to be published, the uninstructed might be guided into giving the proper pauses to the familiar French line:

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI.

Through sunlight, rain, and shine, and snow,
And ever so many a year ago,
What was it that she did to me,
La bellë damë sans merci?

No harm I did to her: a kiss
Or now or then were not amiss;
But to stab deep—ah, that was she—
La bellë damë sans merci!

And she goes singing on her way:
God send her many a happy day!
For heart-strings broken she must not see,
La bellë damë sans merci.

All this was a very pretty fancy, and could have done no harm to anyone concerned, if it had stopped with the writing of verses; but here, on Invernish Castle hill, the hero of this undeveloped tragedy was engaged in asking himself at what hour that afternoon it would be proper for him to call on the two ladies at Glengarva House, and he was wondering whether he could induce Miss Macdonald to co-operate with him in a certain small literary project. He did not stay to reflect that there is such a thing as playing with fire.

It was about half-past four on this same day that Wild Eelin—who was not at all a *"bellë damë sans merci;"* no, nor anything like that; Archie Gilchrist would have got nearer the mark if he had recalled the Shepherd's rhyme about "My love's she's but a lassie yet"——

"She's neither proud nor saucy yet,
She's neither plump nor gaucy yet;
But just a jinkin, bonnie, blinkin,
Hilty skilty lassie yet."

—well, Miss Eelin, finding herself alone in the house—for her mother had gone to pay a call, and most of the maids had been allowed a half-holiday so that they might attend certain Highland sports that were taking place in the neighbourhood—Miss Eelin considering that she had worked long enough at the stitching of a blue-grey blouse that she was economically making for herself, thought she would get out-of-doors and have a little exercise. Just round the corner from her bower of honeysuckle and roses, and in the midst of a grove of tall beeches, there was hung a swing; and when she had comfortably seated herself, she forthwith proceeded to kick herself into the air. But she was a skilful performer; it was no ordinary feat she was bent on; and terrestrial aid was soon dispensed with, as altogether too ignominious. What she had set her mind on was to touch with her toes a certain projecting branch of a lime-tree opposite her; and this she aimed at by means of the well-known trick—that is to say, on the backward rise she pulled herself up by the arms so that she was hardly seated at all, then when the chair came down again she shot out her legs horizontally, with a final upward spring as if she would fling herself to the zenith.

"Ah, but I will!" she was saying, with clenched teeth, as each time she went with a whizzing rush through the air, and ever and ever she was gaining a few inches, so that her up-thrown toes were getting nearer and nearer to the coveted branch. "Ah, but I will! Yes, if I break my back! I'll show Lily Neile what swinging is! She has never been within three yards of that branch. Ah, you beast, I nearly had you that time—well, now, this time—this time——" And

again she went cleaving through the air, throwing herself up and out, as though she would pitch herself feet first into the Moray Firth or on to the top of the North Pole. "You brute, I was within an inch of you that time! But I'll do it—yes, I will—yes, I will!—if I break my back! I'll show Lily Neile what swinging is——"

And then she laughed to herself, in triumphant exultation; for at last one foot just managed to touch the outermost twig; and she knew that Lily Neile might be challenged and defied a hundred times over; for that twig Lily Neile never would touch, no, not if she fractured her spine in the frantic endeavour. And still the young acrobat continued this hurtling of herself through the air, for the mere rush and exilaration and impetus of the thing; and her garments were flying anyhow; and long ago her blue Tam o' Shanter had gone by the board, and her hair was tossing free; and she cared for nothing in life at all save the stiff backward poise, and then the terrific downward plunge, and the breathless swoop upwards again to the green leaves and the sailing heavens. And sometimes she touched the twig, and sometimes she did not; she hardly cared; she knew that Lily Neile was defeated out and away for ever and ever; and with no aim or object to distract her, she could now abandon herself to this wild animal delight of poising herself and then hurling herself down and up again to the skies.

Which was all very well; but of a sudden black horror seized her; for down there, by the corner of the house, appeared a creature—a man creature—with a tall hat, and a frock coat, and kid gloves; and apparently he had been piloted on to the scene by the great, big,

freckled, red-haired, blundering-headed Morag. How Eelin Macdonald managed to retain her position on this little piece of timber it is impossible to say. If, in her fright, she had fallen, she would doubtless have broken her neck. As it was, the worst that happened to her was that she nearly tore the soles off her shoes on the gravel, in stopping herself; and then, with such dignity as was left her, which was not very much, and with blushing, and confusion, and nevertheless a kind of half-concealed giggling in the eyes, as of a schoolgirl caught, she went forward to receive her visitor. What she thought of the blundering-headed Morag cannot be recorded in print.

But her visitor was quite as confused as herself; for although he had consulted a Manual of Etiquette as to the proper hour and the proper costume for an afternoon call, that authoritative guide had not told him how to behave on finding himself confronted by a young damsel shooting herself through the air like a meteor entangled in petticoats. And although she was very suave, and gentle, and courteous, he could see that her eyes were still occultly laughing; and he wanted to explain that he had asked for her mamma; and that he had been brought round into the garden through no wish or intention of his own, but simply by his following the fatuity of the Highland maidservant; and he wished to apologise for his intrusion; and he did not know how to apologise, the predicament being so awkward; and the next thing was that he found himself seated in a garden-chair in front of a little iron table, and Miss Eelin Macdonald (still with her eyes self-conscious and darkly amused) was seated opposite to him, and she had sent

the fatuous Morag for some tea, and she was listening gravely to the literary project upon which, to save himself from unendurable agony, he had at once entered.

And yet he was cunning. He began by saying that he had observed again and again, in the "White Cockade" papers, the remarkable skill with which she could introduce an incident, and make it effective; and he knew that he himself was helpless in that line; but perhaps with her kind direction—or co-operation, rather—the idea he had thought of might be carried out.

"Yes, and what is it, Mr. Gilchrist?" said she, most sweetly; but all the same she was thinking back, and inwardly praying and hoping that her skirts had been conducting themselves in a decorous manner during her meteoric performances.

"Yes, that's just it—I don't know where to start!" said he; but in truth his main concern at this moment was the tall hat he wore. Why had not the Manual of Etiquette told him what to do with a hat in a garden? It would seem absurd to take it off and put it on the grass; and yet, on the other hand, how could he sit covered in the presence of Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig? "Yes, that's just it," he continued. "I cannot construct. I don't know where to begin; and where to end. But I'm sure you could, Miss Macdonald; you would understand how to get the thing into shape; that I am sure of."

The literary project did not seem to form itself somehow. Her eyes were such inexpressibly beautiful things to look at; they were so deep and clear, and of such a wonderful dark sea-blue; and the black eyelashes gave them an indescribable pathos, and an intensity of in-

terest, and a kind of strange inviting sympathy: it was no marvel that a young man's thoughts became somewhat confused. Nevertheless, he had to make a plunge.

"You take a doctor," said he.

"Yes?" said she: and those eyes of hers were so distracting that he knew if he failed to win encouragement from them, the Devil's Kirn would that very night see an end to his sorrows.

"Yes, you take a doctor," he went on. But just at this moment she happened to put the tips of her fingers on the table; and the sight of them fascinated and dazzled him; for when had any mortal man beheld a hand so small and plump and white, with such exquisite filbert-shaped nails? The daintiness of them—and of the little fringe of lace at the edge of the blue-white cuff.

"You take a doctor—in a large provincial town," he said, with a desperate resolution: "and he has a very considerable practice; and all at once he is accused of a felony, and unjustly convicted, and sentenced to penal servitude——"

"Oh, yes!" said she—and she was following him now: she had begun to forget about her flying skirts.

"Not only that, but when the doctor comes out his friends will not believe in his innocence; one and all they cut him; his patients decline his visits; in fact, society is at war with him. Very well. In his indignation and rage he resolves on revenge. While he was in prison he made the acquaintance of a gang of burglars; and when they come out he goes and joins them. And then you see, Miss Macdonald——"

"Yes?—yes?"

Just Heavens, if only her eyes would leave him alone for a moment! His intellect was clear enough—if only she would leave him alone! And the literary scheme was simple, too—but for this bewilderment that sent all his senses wool-gathering.

"And then a most astonishing series of burglaries begins in this provincial town. Someone seems to know the habits of life of each family—the dinner-hour—when the outer door is unlocked—how certain landings can be reached when the servants are engaged—the whereabouts of the principal bedrooms——"

"Oh, I understand—I understand!" she cried. "The doctor! Capital! Excellent!"

"Yes," said he, very much relieved, "but—but where would you begin the story? And what would the end be?"

"Oh, never mind the end at present," said she, gaily. "Let's have the mysterious beginning—the unaccountable burglaries. And there must be a young woman in it somewhere, you know."

"I had no thought of that," he answered her, dubiously.

"Oh, but that is absolutely necessary," she contended. "A crime without a young woman in it isn't half a crime. Why, she must be the doctor's *fiancée!* Then her mother's house is to be broken into. Remorse seizes him. He knows she has angina pectoris, or housemaid's knee, or something that will suddenly kill her. He—oh, what does he do,—oh, Mr. Gilchrist, what does he do!—it must be something wild and splendid!—heroic, you know—he precipitates himself into—into—something; yes, he precipitates himself—into something; and

then he dies—without a word of reproach; and she—what does she do, Mr. Gilchrist?—oh, at the very last moment she discovers he has been falsely accused—and unjustly condemned—and of course he mustn't die for just another minute, until she tells him."

She was far more nimble-witted than he; or perhaps it was the unconscious beguiling of her eyes that perplexed him into silence and listening; at all events on she went with her quick, disconnected, half-mirthful suggestions; besides which, she was pouring out tea for him, and offering him bread-and-butter, and strawberries, and the like. Poor lad, he was overwhelmed with shame. To think that Miss Macdonald should wait upon him—when gladly he would have crawled on the ground to serve her as a slave. But then the fool of a Manual had not told him whether it was his place to pour out the tea; and again her merry suggestions demanded respectful heed; and ever and always "the stound, the deadly wound, Cam frae her een sae bonnie blue."

And then the mother of this young lady appeared upon the scene, concealing her surprise with an admirable serenity and kindliness of manner; and she was most interested (for what interested her daughter interested her) in the literary copartnership; and she happened to indicate that if these two together could get a £5-note from some magazine editor for their tale about the doctor-burglar, she would be pleased to receive the same for her convalescent cottage at Nairn. And Archie Gilchrist, to himself, swore a sacred oath that if any exertion on his part would procure the money, it certainly should be forthcoming. And then, somehow, his intoxicating and unnerving visit drew to a

close; and both of these ladies were so gracious as to say they would be pleased to see him again, to discuss the further aspects of this literary venture. The poor youth!—he did not know with what fire he was playing; or how easily "just a jinkin, bonnie, blinkin, hilty skilty lassie" might, without any intention on her part, become the deadly *"belle dame sans merci."*

CHAPTER XIV.

AN INNOCENT BETRAYAL.

"THE grandest splore that me and David Haggart ever had together was when we was in Ireland," said Maxwell the gardener, with his mysteriously-twinkling eyes fixed on the large and impassive countenance of the Highland lass Morag. That impassive expression deceived him. She had had her instructions from Miss Eelin. She was deliberately letting the poor, swaggering evil-doer fall headlong into a trap.

"And were you not telling me that you yourself was Haggart the murderer?" she observed, without even looking at him.

"Sometimes I may have that black thinking in my mind; sometimes no," he answered her. "It's just accordin' to the transmotion o' souls; but that's a doctrine that's beyond ye, my braw lass. Ye've no the eddication or the introspection for that. But what I was saying was about the splore that me and Haggart had in Ireland. Ay; that was something, I promise ye! Ay, ye never heard o' the like, I'll bate ye! Me and him we

got on new toggery; and we picked up twa blones—but ye'll no ken what's that——"

"Maybe I am knowing very well; and maybe I am not; but if it is anything wrong I will speak to my mistress," said Morag, severely.

"Ye idjit, it's jist twa lasses!" said he, with scorn. "And if there's onything wrong about them themselves can tell best, I jalouse. Ay, and off we set in a jaunting-car, with a boy to drive us; ay, and we was a whole month drivin' through Fermanagh, and Cavan, and Derry—a hundred and ninety pounds it cost us. And a' pleasure, woman!—no a stroke o' business the hale time; from end to end I never put my form into a single keek-clog."

And now his face grew darker; and his eyes were twitching still more nervously.

"But I'm saying: listen to this: that was naething to Downpatrick—Lord save us, that was naething to the awfu' goings-on in the jile at Downpatrick! Me and some more lads locked up in one o' the cells fand out that there were fancy blones in the next cell; ay, and what did we do then? When the three days' proveesions had been served out to us—for that's the wye they do there—we tore up the pavement and blockaded the door; ay, and then we broke through to the blones; and then we barricaded their door jist the same. Oh, what a debatch that was!—twa days o' terrible, terrible debatchery! The like o't was never heard o' in any jile in the kingdom——"

But now was Morag's chance.

"You are boasting of it a great deal, but I am sure it was nothing at all!" she said, with open contempt.

"No—nothing at all! What do you understand about wickedness—why, nothing at all! Do you know what I am? Will I tell you what I am? I am a crib-biter!"

She stared him full in the face, to his utter bewilderment; and then she turned and fled, and went down into the housemaids' room, and flung herself into a chair. Her pent-up feelings were too much for her; her convulsive mirth broke loose; in successive paroxysms of laughter she dashed her fists on her knees; and again she thought of the frightened gardener, and again she beat her knees, and screamed and roared and laughed, and rocked herself until her face grew purple, and tears were running down her cheeks, and her big mouth seemed capable of swallowing several clothes-pins. For Morag did not perceive a joke frequently; but when she did she made the most of it; and besides she had the virtuous consciousness of having amply fulfilled Miss Eelin's instructions, in terrifying the sham Haggart. When at last she wiped her eyes with her apron, and endeavoured to recover herself a bit, she was already trying to think how she could glorify and magnify the tale in relating it to her young mistress.

Meanwhile Miss Eelin, forgetting all about the mischief she had planned, was striding along the river-side path leading into the town; and she was reciting to herself, with the most tragic pathos vibrating in her voice, the sorrows of Callum-a-Glen:

"Was ever old warrior of suffering so weary?
Was ever the wild beast so bayed in his den?
The Southron blood-hounds lie in kennels so near me,
That death would be freedom to Callum-a-Glen.

My chief they have slain, and of stay have bereft me,
My sons are all slain and my daughters have left me;
No child to protect me, where once there was ten,
And woe to the grey hairs of Callum-a-Glen!"

Yes, the most tragic pathos was in her tones; but all the same her heart was just bubbling over with gladness and the animal joy of existence; and she approved of the sunshine that lay warm on the greensward of the Castle hill; and she watched with keenest interest the proceedings of certain kittiwakes that had come in from the Moray Firth to flap and preen themselves in the shallows; and at odd moments she experienced a malicious triumph in thinking that she had subjugated her old enemy, "Fairfax," and that he was now humbly anxious she should collaborate with him in literary ventures—he being a real, actual, professional journalist, too, and not a mere amateur like herself. And so she swung along; and the woes of Callum-a-Glen in no way interfered with her buoyant carriage or with the frank audacity of her demeanour; and in a remarkably short space of time she found herself in Church-street, and at the door of the hotel in which Mr. Allan Macdonald took up his quarters each time he returned to the town.

She only wished to leave a message for him; it was to the effect that General Mallock had been so good as to offer him, through her, another day on the Laggan stretch of the Nish; and would he communicate with the gillie? But just as she was about to address the landlady, whom she knew very well (as she knew nearly everybody), she found herself confronted by Angus the late water-bailiff, who had come downstairs to see what letters had arrived by the midday post; and he so plain-

tively besought her to pay a few minutes' visit to the old blind gentleman that she consented, and forthwith followed Angus up to the sitting-room, where she discovered Mr. Macdonald seated at an open window, hearkening to the various sounds of the street, and no doubt making mental pictures of the scene without. When Angus, giving him the letters, informed him that here was Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig come to see him, the stately white-bearded old man rose instantly to his feet, and advanced a step or two, and found her hand, and held it, patting it a little in affectionate acknowledgment of her kindness, while he listened to her pretty speeches as if there were music in her voice, which indeed there was.

"Two such things to happen to me in one day!" said he, when they were seated. "A visit from you, and a letter from my son. I knew it by the seal when I touched it a second ago."

"But if you would rather go through your letters, Mr. Macdonald," said she, at once, "don't let me interrupt you—I can call some other time—"

"Oh, no—oh, no!" he said, quickly. "I cannot part with either of my pieces of great good fortune. Somerled's letter must wait. Unless—except—well, you have seen the fellow—you might be a little bit interested, too—if you would be so very kind as to read it for me."

"Oh, certainly," she answered him, without thinking; she knew that he was extremely proud of the young railway-king, and guessed that he might want her to know of his great doings. So, when the old man's fingers had selected the letter with the seal, and

when it had been handed over to her, she broke it open and proceeded to read it aloud, without a moment's hesitation.

And indeed all this farrago, as it seemed to her, of extension lines, connections, guarantees, fusions of companies, and the like, appeared quite ordinary and commonplace; it was as if she were reading the newspaper to him, which she often did; only that throughout the letter there was a distinct tone of satisfaction, while the old man's brief ejaculations from time to time told how pleased and vain he was over the courage and enterprise and success of his son. Something different, however, was about to happen.

"And now, my dear Dad," she went on reading aloud, "the question remains, What is to be the outcome of all this, supposing everything goes well? To what end —to what end? For whom or for what am I toiling— when you have all you want, and more? The mere amassing of wealth for its own sake is an ignoble kind of performance; and I have no wish to buy a baronetcy. But you remember the time you and I walked up to the Islands? We stopped at a well. Is it called the Sweet Well or the Priest's Well?—tell me in your next letter: it is a day to be fixed in the memory, for many reasons. Then I revealed my project to you. You called it midsummer madness. You talked of bewitchment or beglamourment. But there is no bewitchment or beglamourment here, amongst all these business affairs. And every day I seem to see more clearly that that very midsummer madness might be the crown of a man's life. And not a vainglorious one either; not the building of a church or chapel, or getting your name put in stained-

glass windows, or public benefactions to pose as a philanthropist. Only a small thing quietly done; and the doer of it to remain for ever unknown. I suppose to every man in his life there comes the one chance; and this would appear to be mine. You need not talk of glamour and witchery; I am thousands of miles away; and I think the scheme might turn out to be feasible—though for the time being it would break me financially, of course. Well, never mind about that; for who would be prouder than yourself—and who would be prouder than the Macdonalds of Ontario—and the Macdonalds all over the world indeed—to hear that the family of Kinvaig were back in their old home in Glengarva?"——

The tall, blind old man was listening with so intense an eagerness that he had forgotten the situation; he had forgotten that he was allowing the girl to blunder into the discovery of his son's great secret. It was she herself who shrank back, in alarm.

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald, I can't read this!" she exclaimed. "I'm afraid there's something — something private—I don't know what it means."

"Yes, yes," he responded instantly, as the truth broke upon him—and he showed as much trepidation as herself. "Give me the letter, please! I will explain to you, my dear young lady—there has been a little mistake—a little mistake—I thought he would be writing only about the railways. But there's no harm done—no, no; for I will explain to you——"

His fingers trembled a little as they received back the compromising document; and for a moment or two he hesitated. No doubt he was casting about for some plausible story to get him out of this desperate strait.

"You see, Miss Eelin, this is the way of it now: if you knew Somerled as I know him you would understand that in the commercial affairs that make up the most part of his life he is shrewd, practical, matter-of-fact, hard-headed—ay, just as hard-headed as anyone could wish; and yet all the same there is a streak of romance in his nature—under the surface, as it were. And maybe he and I may have been talking some nonsense —at the well out there—about the Macdonald clan, and Glengarva, and so on; and he has been brought up to have a sentimental regard for the old place, I'm not denying that; and some fancy may have taken possession of his head, for the time being—like enough, like enough. But—but, Miss Eelin, I would not pay too much heed to such chance talk; and if ye will forget that I was so imprudent as to show you the letter: and—and I'm sure you will never mention a word of such a thing to anyone——"

"Never—never," she said, earnestly. "Never to any human being."

He seemed greatly relieved by this definite promise; and he proceeded to distract her attention with quite a number of wholly different subjects, perhaps hoping that the slip he had made—through the unfortunate accident of his blindness—would entirely pass out of her recollection. But it is not so easy, however willing one may be, to pass a sponge over the slate of memory: and when Eelin Macdonald left that hotel her face was graver than its wont; she almost seemed afraid; her customary audacity of manner was for the moment gone. What had the younger Macdonald meant by witchery and glamour? What had he meant by the return of the

Kinvaig family to Glengarva? And then she remembered her promise; and she determined she would forget —or else treat the whole thing as an idle phantasy, as a bit of "midsummer madness," in short; and as the easiest way to secure this oblivion was to address herself to the actual and immediate duties of the hour, she now, first of all, went along to Mr. Forbes, the station-master, to arrange with him about a third-class compartment for the return of one of her convalescents from Nairn.

At this same point of time, in the refreshment-room of the station, an unusual scene was being enacted, which was not visible to the odd stragglers about the platform because of the folding doors having swung-to. At the further end of the place were Lord Mountmahon and one of his prize-fighting bodyguard: at this end were Arty Hoskins and another of the bullet-headed, broken-nosed fraternity, and these rival factions were pelting each other with all sorts of missiles—buns, cakes, sandwiches—anything they could snatch from the counter. The barmaid at the further end was cowering in a corner, terrified out of her life at the riot that was going on; but the barmaid at this end was in a fury of indignant rage, because she had been hit on the cheek by a box of chocolates.

"Will ye stop that now?" she cried. "Will ye stop it? I'll have in the police at ye!"

But the podgy and pallid-faced nobleman at the head of the apartment was enjoying this mirth immensely; he encouraged the fray, because so far he had escaped unscathed; and gradually there was less discrimination in the choice of projectiles, until at last his

lordship's bowler-hat was half knocked off his head by a heavy pair of sugar-tongs. The pudding face paled, partly with anger, and partly with fear.

"Who flung that?" he demanded—and the scrimmage quieted down. "That was you, Arty. By ——, that was you, Arty—"

"I'll take my oath it wasn't!" cried the music-hallish young man with the cadaverous complexion. "I've stuck to this tin o' biscuits, blime me if I 'aven't!"

"Then it was Conky—Conky, by ——, I'll brain you sooner or later." He turned sulkily to the barmaids. "Here, what's the damage? Don't look frightened out o' your wits!—did you never see a bit o' fun before? Take that for the bloomin lot!" He threw a couple of sovereigns on to the counter. "Come along, lads!—or shall we have one more drink?"

"I'll not serve ye, sir—no, I'll not!" said the barmaid who had lost her temper. "We're not allowed to serve people that are either drunk or mad."

He scowled at her, but said nothing; and then he and his companions pressed open the folding doors and the motley crew tumbled confusedly out into the stony and hollow-sounding station.

Just then Eelin Macdonald came forth from Mr. Forbes's office, and proceeded to the entrance. Perhaps her glance fell upon this rowdy gang: perhaps it did not; at all events her proud Highland air betrayed no consciousness as she passed on. But the effect on Lord Mountmahon of this sudden apparition was astonishing.

"Who's that? Who is she?" he exclaimed, in a loud whisper. "By ——, she's a clinker! Eyes like an ox —and the long lashes—and see how she walks! I must

find out her name! I must get introduced to her! Come along, Arty, and we'll see who she is!"

And then and there he was for eagerly following her; but Hoskins gripped him firmly by the arm and held him back.

"Mounty, behave yourself—behave yourself, man!"

It may have been an accident; but the portion of Mountmahon's sleeve that his companion had grasped was the black band that denotes mourning. It had been there for a matter of ten days.

CHAPTER XV.

"BUT TO STAB DEEP."

THE relations that were gradually growing up between Archie Gilchrist, late draper's clerk, and now assistant sub-editor of the Invernish *Observer,* and the two ladies at Glengarva House, were certainly peculiar; and even the gentle Bean-an-Tighearn, largely tolerant as she was towards anybody or anything that interested or amused her daughter, began to look on with a little misgiving.

"You know, Eelin," she observed one morning, "I would not say a word against your friend, Mr. Gilchrist. He seems to me a most amiable young man; and he is clever and well read and anxious to be obliging. Undoubtedly he is all that——"

"'But,' mother; now is the time for the 'but,'" said the younger lady.

The mother blushed like a girl of fifteen; she did not like to find fault, or make objection.

"Well, Eelin—would you—would you say—he had quite the appearance of a gentleman?"

"I know he is a gentleman at heart; and he has the manners of a gentleman," replied the girl, undauntedly. "He is modest and unassuming; he has an instinctive sympathy and consideration for others; and do you think I am going to judge of him by the shape of his coat? It is true, he might get his hair cut; I will grant you that, Mummie; but I've told you again and again that geniuses like him and me prefer long and wild hair; and anything—anything in the whole wide world—is better than to be similar in look to everybody else."

"Now, Eelin, answer me this," said the mother. "Would you introduce him to Lily Neile?"

The great dark-blue eyes stared out from their black lashes; nor was her astonishment feigned.

"Lily Neile? She would be honoured! Give me the chance and I'll show you!"

She got the chance before she could have expected; for that very afternoon Archie Gilchrist called; and he had brought with him a synopsis of the burglar-doctor story; and they professed to be quite charmed with the idea of the literary co-partnership, and quite eager to follow the outlines of the little tale. Moreover he appeared to consider it would be rude of him to leave while they exhibited this curiosity; and perhaps out of courtesy towards him they may have somewhat exaggerated their interest; at all events, this strange and unaccountable young man with the riotous flaxen locks stayed on and stayed on, and there was no sign of his going. How could there be? How could he tear himself away from glamour-land, and from this all too enchanting com-

panionship? Look even at his material surroundings, out here in the garden. As the evening drew on, the woods across the river were darkening in their cold intensity of green; but all the overhead heavens were a blaze of soft, pale, rose-pink clouds borrowing their glory from some unknown region out in the west; and this splendour of colour was mirrored on the oily waters of the wide stream, with here and there a fretted touch or thread of silvery blue-grey. As for the silence, if Little Isabel of the Bannocks had uttered the faintest cry, over yonder on the leafy heights where she was cruelly slain, they could have heard it; for indeed the stillness of twilight was stealing over the world; and even the birds were hushed. No, he could not tear himself away—while the lady with the sweet voice was talking gently to him, and while the younger lady with the bewildering eyes was looking at him, sometimes mocking at his suggestions, sometimes volunteering her own.

A low whistle sounded, and was once repeated. With a word of apology Eelin left her companions, walked across the tennis-lawn, and glanced over the outward-sloping fence. Just down below her two young ladies were standing in the roadway.

"Hallo, old crock," said one of them, familiarly, "how are you? Going to do a mouch?"

"Nan, your language is distinctly inferior," observed Miss Eelin, in severe tones.

"Come along, old girl! Lily Neile means to fish all the way down to the Devil's Kirn; and we can sit on the bank and watch. We'll go round by the Islands, and be there in a sec."

"Not to be done—I have a visitor."

"Oh! A him, of course. Ta-ta, then. So long!"

After this secret colloquy, Eelin returned to her place at the little garden-table; and as the unconscionable young man showed no signs of departing, she got it into her head that she would like to see how long he would stay; and so she deliberately began and talked and talked—tales of herself and her experiences at home and abroad—all kinds of things of the most heterogeneous nature—while the puzzled mother could not make out what malice or mischief was afloat. And what was it she did not say to him?—and he could not be so ill-bred as to rise and leave while she was doing her best to entertain him! Nay, the unfortunate youth forgot all about time and circumstance, and could only listen and listen, while "those eyes of blue," as the Russian song says, held him, and were working his destruction. She described to him, for example, how when she was a very young girl she and her mamma were walking along the Corso Vittorio Emmanuele in Palermo, and an old flower-seller came up and asked her to buy one of his bouquets. "How much?" she said. "A franc," he answered. "Oh, I'm sorry I can't afford it," she said—her schoolgirl funds being limited—and then she turned away. But just at this moment two Italian gentlemen were passing, who must have overheard; for one of them immediately purchased the bouquet, and brought it to her, and said, "Will Mademoiselle permit me the honour of presenting the flowers to an English young lady?"—and he handed her the bouquet, and walked on with his friend.

"Now," observed Miss Eelin, when she had come to the end of this blood-curdling recital, "a Highlander

would no doubt wish to be as polite as that; but he wouldn't have the self-possession—"

"No, nor the franc," said her mother, demurely.

And so the mischief-maker rambled from this to that; and meanwhile the rose-red had left the sky; the mystic grey of the twilight had stolen into the world; there was a strange metallic sheen on the surface of the river; and now and again an orange ray would shoot through the foliage on the opposite heights, where a public gas-lamp or a window in one of the houses had been suddenly lit up, to remain there, a steady golden star. And then into the phantom-world there crept silently and slowly a phantom white boat, and there was a phantom grey lady noiselessly plying a salmon-rod, the line of which was invisible to them. There was something ghostly and eerie in the presence of that solitary and spectral fisherwoman; it was a sort of unsubstantial pageant out there in the gathering dusk; and for the moment Wild Eelin stopped her chatter, to look on.

"It's Lily Neile," she said, almost in a whisper. "She's just coming to the Devil's Kirn."

But at this very moment she was recalled to herself; for there came out into the pervading silence the muffled thunder of the gong in the hall: and she knew that she had wrought her wicked will; and that she had inveigled this poor young man into staying right on till dinner-time. And she wondered what her mother would do now. But the Bean-an-Tighearn was not to be disconcerted by the tricks of a brat of a schoolgirl.

"Mr. Gilchrist," she said, with the utmost simplicity of kindness, "won't you come in and have a bit of

dinner with us? There is no ceremony, of course, living by ourselves as we do."

The hapless youth was dumbfounded: the sound of the gong had told him that again he had blundered, this time worse than ever; and how was he to make his excuses and get safely away? Then Eelin, with a sudden return to her usual frank generosity, came to his help.

"Yes, do, Mr. Gilchrist!" said she. "Take pity on two lone women. It's all my fault that we have kept you. It would be so awfully kind of you. And I'll call in Lily Neile to make a fourth. Fergus can take a message home for her, and come back and wait for her. Lily!—Lily!—I want you! Give up and come ashore!" Her voice went echoing through the gloom; and presently they could dimly make out that the black figure in the bow of the boat was hauling at the cable, while the shadowy craft crept stealthily along, dividing the steely surface of the stream. And in a few moments here was Lily Neile—a blithe and debonair lass, who seemed to take matters pretty well as they came; and she accepted the invitation at once; old Fergus was sent off with a message; and these four made their way into the dining-room, ready to welcome whatever kind of impromptu banquet could be procured for them.

And indeed it was a merry meal, with even something of brilliancy and charm about it. For by this time Archie Gilchrist had found his wits; and he considered it his duty to interest as best he might these companions of his; and whether by accident or design the ladies of Glengarva had given the talk a bookish turn, so that he had his opportunity. At first Lily Neile regarded this

strange young man with a mild astonishment: he was so different from the young men she was in the habit of meeting. His eyes, for instance, had no repose in them, no complacent and self-satisfied unconcern; they were quick, apprehensive, and eagerly responsive; and in his anxiety to please his brain seemed to go at sixty miles to the second. And then again those large grey eyes would glow and burn, until she began to say to herself "Perhaps this uncouth young man is a genius! Eelin Macdonald is always picking up odd kind of folk—semi-lunatics and people like that." And all the while the unfamiliar young man was discoursing, and answering and assenting, and sometimes advancing iconoclastic paradoxes, just to keep things lively. He maintained that the popular ear was more correct than Milton's, and that "To-morrow to fresh fields and pastures new" should be recognised as the standard reading. He said he was perfectly certain that Shakespeare wrote

> "Golden lads and lasses must,
> Like chimney-sweepers, come to dust,"

and that the mauling of the song in *Cymbeline* was due to some prompt-book copier. He contended that Tennyson had no right to alter, in the later editions of his poems, lines that in their original form had become the permanent property of the English-speaking peoples. And so on; his memory seemed inexhaustible; and he talked with vivacity and nerve; while the grey eyes glowed and burned, glancing from the one to the other of his audience. Lily Neile sate silent, and curious. This was not the kind of talk with which the young man of the day, as she knew him, favoured his acquaintances. But presently it occurred to her that she, too, must be

literary; she must help to keep the ball rolling. So she said—

"Eelin, I could give you a fine story to introduce into one of your 'White Cockade' papers."

"Yes?"

"I once had a pet donkey——"

"Most girls appear to like to have some such creature trotting about after them," observed Miss Eelin, with a philosophic air.

"I mean a real one," said Lily Neile, indignantly; "and the most beautiful little animal you ever saw. He began his life as a baby moke in a pantomime. Then, when the pantomime was over, he was given to some friends of ours. They could do nothing with him, so they gave him to us. We could do nothing with him, so we sent him to the farm bailiff to keep for us till he should grow up. We were living in Surrey at that time. He did grow up, and then began his adventures, for nothing could keep that animal in—neither fence nor hedge nor anything. One day he jumped over into a washing-green and munched up a whole lot of table cloths and curtains. Then naturally he got ill, and the vet.'s bill was something awful. Then when he got well he resumed his careering about the country. I won't tell you all his escapades—it would take a week; I'll come at once to the tragic climax. He managed one morning to draw the Surrey staghounds off the proper scent; and the moment he discovered he was being pursued, off he set—over gates and stiles and hedges and ditches—with the pack in full cry after him. There never was such a run! People talk of it to this day—but rather with bated breath, you understand—I mean

those who were engaged in the chase. Somehow they don't seem altogether proud of it, although it was distinctly the run of the season. And not a sound did my beautiful Jim—that was his name—not a sound did he utter, not a single bray until he had enjoyed as much of the fun as he wanted; and by this time he had got to a fine and picturesque position—the front of a spinney on the crest of a hill; and there he faced right round and surveyed the whole scene, the baffled hounds, the infuriated huntsman, the mortified Master, and the amazed and straggling crowd behind them; and then he shot out his forelegs, and gave a prodigious *hee-haw! hee-haw! hee-haw!* It was the run of the season—it was indeed!"

"Oh, Lily Neile!"—that was all the comment Eelin offered—but she looked reproachfully at her friend.

"His name was Jim," remarked the young lady again, by way of final and absolute corroboration.

Then when dinner was over they all of them returned to the drawing-room; and Lily Neile played Rubinstein's Melody in F—and played it very well too; and that ferocious young Jacobite, Wild Eelin, went away into the corner where her harp stood, and there she sang to them

"O gin I were a bonny bird,
  Wi' wings that I might flee,
Then I would travel o'er the main,
  My ae true love to see;
Then I would tell a joyfu' tale
  To ane that's dear to me,
And sit upon a king's window,
  And sing my melody."

And there were one or two more pieces and one or two more songs; and a certain youth sate in a sort of dreamland, his nerves all tingling with rapture, and wonder, and a vague and aching fear that such an evening would never happen to him again. But of a sudden something more dramatic occurred, and for a moment it almost seemed to him—waking out of his trance—that he must become the defender and champion of three easily-alarmed and gentle ladies. For the door was opened, and there appeared a man, accompanied by a black collie. The man was a short, tightly-made person in knickerbockers of homespun; and his weather-tanned features and the staff that he carried bore a suggestion that he was a shepherd or a keeper, and of quite respectable mien; but that there was something wrong was evident, in a pathetic kind of way, from the perplexed and anxious manner in which the collie kept looking up at his master's face. The newcomer gazed in a mystified fashion all round the drawing-room; and of course Archie Gilchrist neither spoke nor moved—for this stranger might have come on business; but when Gilchrist, happening to glance towards the Bean-an-Tighearn, saw that she was overcome with dismay, he instantly jumped to his feet, with the intention of throwing the intruder out by the front door, which he very easily could have done. He did not know Eelin Macdonald. There was not much alarm visible in her expression. On the contrary, she interposed, and put Gilchrist aside with a slight gesture of authority, and went up to the man.

"Well, good friend, what can I do for you?" she said, in the most unconcerned and amiable fashion.

He regarded her with his bemused eyes; and now the collie had turned to look up at her, as if wistfully appealing to her for help.

"There are the three wyes," said the shepherd or keeper, and he spoke slowly and solemnly, "of dalin' with Russia."

"Yes?—and what would be your way?" she inquired.

He regarded her again for a moment or two, in a mysterious silence. And then he shook his head, mournfully.

"I'm telling ye—there's only the three wyes."

"Yes?—and what would be your way of dealing with Russia?" she again asked of him in an encouraging manner.

She might as well have questioned the collie.

"There's only the three wyes," he repeated, darkly.

"Look here, my friend, I'll let you into a secret," she said, in a burst of confidence. "For you there's only the one way—and that's to go home and go to bed. Don't you see how troubled your dog is about you? Don't you see that he wants you to get home? Where are you bound for—the town, or out into the country?"

"Ay, well, the town. Bit about Russia now——"

She put her hand on his arm.

"I say, you come with me, and I'll see you safely down the steps—they're rather dark at this time of night. And if it was stupid of the servants to leave the hall-door open, and you came in to ask about Russia, indeed there's no harm done: only, I must see you safely down the steps, you know, and we'll talk about Russia some other time."

She led him away, and he went with her quite obediently, the collie following closely behind. She took him through the hall, and guided him down the steps, until he was safely on the gravel path.

"Now mind you don't go near the river. Keep to the road; and go to bed as soon as you get home. And we'll talk about the three ways of dealing with Russia when we next meet. Good-night!"

In the dusk he paused for a moment.

"Good-night, your leddyship," he said—for something seemed to have impressed him: perhaps her quiet air of authority—perhaps her English way of speech. "I hope I wass not doing anything wrong."

"No, no, not at all! Good-night!"

So she saw him on his way; and then she went back to the drawing-room, to soothe and comfort her trembling mamma.

"Miss Macdonald," said Archie Gilchrist, "if you had allowed me, I think I could have saved you all that trouble."

"Oh, yes," she answered him, laughing. "I know. I know what you would have done. But, you see, there are the three wyes; and my wye is the best wye."

* * * * *

Early next morning, while as yet the grey and golden and purple dawn had not wholly declared itself above the wooded heights, Archie Gilchrist was out at the Islands, that were now as solitary and silent as death; and he was pacing slowly along the winding paths that led through successive wildernesses of shrubbery, under the over-arching limes and sycamores. Perhaps he had not slept much during the night; perhaps he had not

slept at all; for there are occasions that leave haunting memories, demanding that every glance and word shall be recalled, with anxious fears lest this or that phrase may have been misinterpreted. It was only in a mechanical way that he looked abroad over the wide-glancing river, whose continuous murmur seemed to speak of distant things: and it was with unobservant sight that he regarded the objects near him—the narrow channels with their tea-brown current—the hanging bushes of ash and alder—the smooth avenues through the undergrowth. But presently he came to a more open glade; and here he sate down on the grassy bank, opposite a long weir over which the broad stream came foaming white and loud; and in a vacant sort of way he gazed, and continued to gaze, at the rushing water—while the new day stole into the awakening heavens, and the hills in the west came out of the night.

Within the range of his vision there was another object, though he did not deliberately look at it—nay, he rather avoided looking at it: it was a house of red sandstone, away on the other side of the spacious stream, and further down; rather a picturesque house, amply adorned with ivy, and surrounded by trees and garden and tennis lawn, adjacent to the open fields, and overlooking the river. At one corner on the first floor there was a window consisting of two arched partitions; they were so far away from him that each section hardly seemed to have more than the breadth of a half-crown. That was Eelin Macdonald's room; he knew it was so, because she herself had described the view from it; and he knew also that sooner or later the white blind would be raised. No, he did not look that way; and yet

somehow his eyes were conscious of the narrow and arched partitions, and the little iron balcony beneath, with its glow of scarlet geraniums and yellow calceolarias. Sooner or later the white blind would be raised; and the time was drawing on; there was sunlight now on the red front of the house, on the ivy, on the black araucaria, on the brilliant garden-plots. He felt himself an intruder, a spy—even at this great distance; but there was a strange fascination and compulsion that held him there. Unknown to himself, he now and again shivered a little; perhaps the wind blowing up the Great Glen—from the regions about Loch Ruthven and Castle Urquhart—may have been a trifle cold.

And then he rose and walked away home, something sick at heart, and hopeless. And this he had forgotten: not once during all these long hours had he given a single glance towards the south, to see whether the visionary towers of the Abbey still rose pale and silvery-grey and phantasmal beyond the soft green uplands.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THERE CAM' A YOUNG MAN."

"How do you do, Mrs. Macdonald? May I have the pleasure of introducing to you my friend, Lord Mountmahon?"

The speaker was a tall, elderly person, with a livid skin, a little white moustache, and cold grey eyes: his name was Major Forres, and he had achieved some measure of distinction in his day, outside the limits of his own profession, for, as war correspondent, and generally

under the influence of whisky, he had blustered and lied all over Eastern Europe; though now he had retired to his native county, to bluster and lie on golf-links and at afternoon teas. The Bean-an-Tighearn disliked him; Eelin hated him; but none the less his assurance gave him the run of the house, especially when, as on the present occasion, he had some favour to demand.

The potboy-looking younger man—who was very smartly-dressed, with a red begonia in his button-hole—advanced to the two ladies, and there was a most ingratiating grin on his rotund features; and his manner was not at all bad. And although his eyes went back again and again to Eelin Macdonald, with an open admiration that needed no other avowal, it was to her mother that he had the tact chiefly to address himself.

"You see, I've often wished to call on you," said he, with an easy self-confidence, "if only to make an apology. Upon my word, I never think of you, or hear your name mentioned, but I consider myself an interloper. I do, indeed. Why should I be in Kinvaig House, and you here?"

"Oh, but that is an old story, Lord Mountmahon," said the elder lady, with a gracious smile. "And I am sure you had nothing to do with the sale or the purchase of the estate. You are merely the tenant under Sir Charles Orme, as anyone else might be; and besides, when one sells anything, one may regret the circumstances that compel the sale, but it would be rather unreasonable to blame the buyer."

"Oh, that's all very well," said he, doggedly; "that's all very well; but one has got a conscience, don't you know; and I feel myself an interloper; and I wish to

apologise. If there is anything I can do—you just say the word and I'll do it. I'm not a bad sort, as you may have heard. I like a little fun; but where's the harm in that? I want to do the right thing; yes, I do. And look here, now; sometimes you come to Glengarva, to lend a helping hand to some of the old people. Well, then, why not make use of Kinvaig House? Do you think I will inflict myself on you? Oh, but I won't though! I'll turn every man-jack out of the place; and we'll put up at the inn; and Miss Macdonald and you and your maid and your coachman can have the house to yourselves, just as long as it suits you. Of course, I would leave the servants. There's no one else now to receive you—no one else now: you must have seen in the newspapers what happened——"

"I am sure we were most grieved to hear of that terrible accident," said Eelin's mother, in her sympathetic way—though it was difficult even to mention such a thing.

"Oh," said he, lightly, "it was just my luck. I have the most awful luck. I was born like that. Still, we must tide along, don't you know. Little use sitting down and folding your hands. A good old wholesome weep may be a comfort to you ladies, now and again; but a man hasn't time. There's things to be done. There's the everyday work of the world. You've got to eat your dinner, whatever happens; and that's what I call common-sense. No use fretting. Up and be doing is my motto. You only live once, and you've got to make the most of it. It's only kiddies who cry over spilt milk. Very well," he continued, in his brisk and cheerful and chirrupy manner—and now it was to the younger lady he had

turned, with a bold and audacious gaze that considerably abashed her who was not readily abashed. "Look here, Miss Macdonald, I would like to get up something for your amusement—something that would amuse your mother and you; and I have got a notion. Not my own, of course; some other fellow did it. I forget who he was; never mind; wise men invent ideas, but wiser men make use of them; and I'm not particular to a hair. It's this kind of thing. You know where the Highland line comes through the Drumouchter forest, up beyond Dalwhinnie: it's a pretty lonely neighbourhood, that is: one could have one's skylark without the risk of many spectators being about. And when I say I want to amuse you, I mean it; I don't confine myself to a twopenny-halfpenny picnic, with champagne-cup gone flat and earwigs crawling about the dishes: my idea is to do the thing slap-up or let it alone. And if you'll let me drive you from Kingussie, I'll get a proper turn-out, you trust me; and you needn't be afraid to put yourselves in my charge, for I can take a team along. Yes, I can. I don't like to boast, but if there's one thing I have at my fingers' ends it's the handling of the ribbons. See me in Bond-street of a July afternoon—half-past four—just at its crowdedest: a smart four-in-hand—lively horses—a pretty woman on the box—and you would say I could run that machine to rights. The Major will bear me out. Can't I do it, Forres?"

"You can, Mounty, you can," said the saturnine person with the cold grey eyes. "His lordship, Mrs. Macdonald, is a capital whip; and more than that he has an excellent regard for the safety of his own neck; so you need not fear he will throw you over embankments."

"But—but—I don't quite understand the proposal," said Mrs. Macdonald, rather bewildered.

"Oh, I'm coming to that," continued the bullet-headed and crop-haired young man; and Miss Eelin, resentful in her maiden pride, was glad that for the moment he had ceased his too familiar scrutiny of her features and form. "Yes, I'm coming to that. For what are ordinary amusements? Nothing! They're amusements that don't amuse—not one little blooming bit. They're all played out. Well, I've been thinking. You may say it isn't a habit of mine; but then I don't profess to be one of the clever Johnnies; and that's so much to my credit. And when you can get your thinking done for you, by paying a penny, or three pennies, for a newspaper, what's the use of your bothering? Let the other fellows think; they earn their living that way; and a deuced good living too, I'm told—their broughams, and their dining with Archbishops, and their shoots in Norfolk: entertaining their friends as if they were to the manor born—manor, d'ye see—manor, not manner—Gad, I don't so often make a joke that I can let it be missed—"

"Awful old, Mounty," said his companion.

"Never mind. Good vintage. Improves by keeping," rejoined his lordship, with perfect complacency. "And this is what I mean to do, Miss Macdonald: I mean to buy two railway-engines—rather a costly performance—but it's no good sticking at trifles. You only live once. Two railway engines; I'll have them taken up to that lonely part of the line; and I'll have them separated by about a mile; then full speed ahead—and the engineers jump off:—and the two engines come at

each other like two bulls. That will be something to see! I think you will be impressed. I think you will be struck—"

"I hope not," said Eelin's mother, looking down.

"Oh, I don't mean that way. I'll take care of you ladies. I'll have a platform erected on the hillside. I'll keep you out of harm. But the crash will be something for you to remember. It will be something *recherché*, or I'm a sinner. Most people who have seen a railway collision have lost a leg or an arm in consequence, or got themselves eternally busted to bits; but here you sit in your arm-chair and look on; you've nothing to fear; you watch the two engines come careering along—and then there's the tremendous bash, as if the whole universe was knocked into smithereens—"

Of a sudden his lordship stopped. Eelin's black cat, Beelzebub, had come noiselessly in at the open door. Mountmahon stared, in a suspicious manner; then he winked his eyes twice, and stared again; but when he saw Miss Eelin catch the animal into her lap, and begin to stroke it, he appeared to be reassured, and resumed.

"Yes, I think that will be something rather splendid: the two iron bulls coming full speed at each other, and then the terrific smash, and splinters flying to the skies, and the roaring of the steam. Rather neat. Rather *recherché*. What do you say, Mrs. Macdonald?"

"You may amuse yourself with the fancy, Lord Mountmahon," Eelin's mother answered him, "but of course you could never really contemplate such extravagance and waste."

"What I want I get," said the pudding-faced young

man, with all the firmness of which his features were capable, "or at least I make an amazing good try." And then again he turned to Eelin, staring at her all over as he spoke. "And when it's to pay a compliment, or to give pleasure, to one's friends—one's particular friends—I try a hundred times harder, you may take your oath on that. And I generally succeed. Yes, I do. I generally manage. I've got a way, you know. He'll never be happy till he gets it, like somebody's soap; and I generally get the soap. Now, what do you say, Miss Macdonald?—or will you forgive me if I ask you what your Christian name is?"

Miss Eelin did not, or could not, reply; she was disconcerted; her dignity was wounded; to have her Christian name demanded by a stranger, and that stranger impudently staring at her?—why, it was like asking her to tell the colour of her stockings. And in another moment she would have burst into tears—so angry was she at finding herself scrutinised, and helpless. But the gentle mother intervened.

"My daughter's name is Eelin, Lord Mountmahon."

"Ah, that's much better!" said his lordship, with a happy air. "Miss Eelin—that's much better! Miss Macdonald—why, it's universal—it's like Miss Smith. Well, Miss Eelin, that is what I am willing to do for you. I'll get the two engines; and I'll pay the Highland Company for any damage done to their line. They'll look after themselves, never fear. The most grudging and disobliging line in Great Britain. Now the Aberdeen is what I call a friendly line; I always try to do them a good turn when I can; but then, don't you see, I want you to have this spectacle up in the wilds, with no on-

lookers. And if you have a fancy for a pavilion on the hillside, it shall be there. I'll see you through. I'll do the thing proper. You only live once. And what's twenty bull-fights to a crash like that, and the heaving up of iron, and the roaring of the steam? I'll do it. When I want a thing, I get it—or I must know the reason why. Well, Miss Eelin—yours is a pretty name—you won't mind my saying that—oh, monstrous pretty! Well, Miss Eelin, what's your answer? Are you on? I'll do it. Rather splendid, you know, up there in the wilds—somewhat *recherché*—just a bit swagger—when the two roaring iron bulls come tearing along—that's what I'll do for you, and I can't make you a fairer offer."

And where was the wildness of Wild Eelin now? She was embarrassed, self-conscious, almost distressed; her chief concern was to get away from this young man's too ardent inspection.

"Oh, if you please, Lord Mountmahon," said she—and she was confused, and bashful, and downcast—not the least bit like her usual self—"if you would please to leave me out; I know I should be too nervous and frightened—perhaps my mother would be more interested."

"Come, come," said he, encouragingly, "I am not going to ask you for your Yes or your No all at once. Young ladies are shy—I know their ways. Think it over. I'm staying in Invernish at present, and if you'll allow me, I'll look in now and again, and try to persuade you. It's a great scheme, mind. It's worth considering. I wouldn't undertake it for anybody else—no, not much! But there it is. There's my offer. It's at your

disposal. And I would take it as an awful favour if you would consent, I would really. I'm not good at blarney, you know; but I mean what I say. I'll do the thing slap-up—yes, I will. And if there's any trimmings you can suggest, they'll be added on—or I'm a Dutchman. And don't decide all at once. Think it over. And when I next give myself the pleasure of calling, there may be a more definite Yes or No; but I hope it will be a Yes."

He took his hat in his hand, and rose, and turned to the elder lady.

"And remember, Mrs. Macdonald, whenever you think of visiting Glengarva, Kinvaig House is at your service. I mean it. I'm not much of a talker; but I mean what I say."

And so, with sundry compliments and grins—and with a final effort to meet Eelin's eyes with his own that he might convey a message to her—he withdrew, accompanied by his cadaverous friend; and mother and daughter were left to themselves.

"Well, Eelin," said the former, with some humour in her look, "you would appear to have made a conquest this time."

The girl sate silent, her heart thumping within her. All her highly-strung nervous temperament was in revolt —against she knew not what. She was frightened; and ashamed to be frightened; and ashamed to show her mother she was frightened. At last she said indignantly—

"What made Major Forres bring that man here?"

"But—but what have you to say against him?" responded the mother, in astonishment that was perhaps a trifle feigned. "Perhaps his lordship does not seem very

clever or accomplished; and perhaps he talks a good deal about himself; but the world is made up of all sorts. You must learn to be charitable, my dear Whirlwind. You'll find it a most useful quality—more and more so the longer you live. Of course everyone knows that Lord Mountmahon associates with rather a peculiar class of people—at times, at all events; or it might be more generous to say hitherto—for who can tell what influence the tragic trouble he has passed through may not have had on him? And perhaps there may have been exaggeration in the common talk; at all events, if they make excuses for him by calling him a creature of impulse, this afternoon he showed himself a creature of very munificent impulse—"

"Smashing two railway engines together!" said Eelin, with disdain. "Are we children, to be attracted by such folly!"

"Still, there was the intention, you know," the mother remonstrated, in her pacific way. "It isn't everyone who is quick to invent. He wanted to do his best to interest you."

"I hope he won't darken our door again!" said Eelin, with proud lips; and she rose from the chair quickly and impatiently, as though she would throw all recollection of this visit behind her. "And now I am going into the town, to see if old Mr. Macdonald is at his hotel. Perhaps he will come out for a walk; and I'll bring him here, mother; and I know you'll be kind to him. And the atmosphere of the house may be clear by then!"

Thus it was that George Reginald Talbot Fitz-Ingram Taylyour, Marquess of Macmahon, made the acquaint-

ance of Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig. "Who is she? Who is she?" he had exclaimed, in breathless admiration, when he saw her come out of Mr. Forbes's office. Well, now he knew who she was. But who was to tell him what she was? For there were so many answers to that perplexing question.

"Oh, Wild Eelin?" her girl companions would have said. "Why, she's just a brick! She should have been a boy! And the way she waltzes—she's as strong as a young pony, and as light as a butterfly; she just carries you round the room: it's like a dream!"

The young men would have been less enthusiastic.

"Oh, Eelin Macdonald? A shade too clever for some of us. Takes the measure of you, don't you know. Writes for the newspapers, and that sort of thing. Devilish handsome, all the same."

But the one who knew her best had different thoughts about her. In the passionate hours of the night, when reason had relaxed its hold, the mother would cry to herself,

"Eelin—my Eelin—what is to become of her? She is a fire—a flame—she is so eager, and sensitive, and keen; she will burn herself out unless she has some strong man by her side, to steady her and control and protect her. And if that is not to be—if she should meet with a great disappointment—if it is as a flame that her life is to burn itself out—then, dear God, let me go too! How much of agony could I endure after being left alone? Surely three days is the most that could be expected of me! Almighty Father in Heaven, if you have mercy, make it two days! Or one—or one—surely twelve hours of that loneliness would kill

me: ah, welcome death—the kindness of death!" And so the dark hours of the night would be shaken with sobs.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEEPER AND DEEPER.

SURELY never in all the world was a literary co-partnership carried on in more enchanting circumstances: golden afternoons, with the sunlight flooding the spacious greensward of the tennis-lawn; the garden plots brilliant in purple, and white, and scarlet, and yellow; shaded seats (for earnest consultation) under the spreading limes; and then the promenade along the river front, overlooking the pink-grey shingle and the shining breadth of blue water stretching over to the leafy heights beyond. This young Gilchrist foresaw his ruin; and rather courted it; so demented was the lad. He was bewildered by her eyes, as the sea birds are bewildered that dash themselves against the glare of the lighthouses on the wild Atlantic nights. And the *belle dame sans merci* "went singing on her way," without thought of harm. Why should there be harm? She was eagerly interested in these literary projects. The doctor-burglar story was proceeding apace. Then he brought her the monthly magazines, for her perusal and opinion; and her smallest hint, of approval or disapproval, waxed large when it came to his writing out. How little did the ladies and gentlemen who were strenuously calling attention to themselves in these periodicals imagine that their pathetic efforts were being adjudged upon during idyllic conferences under

the great black araucaria, while the wide stream murmured as it swung along, and the soft winds blew, and the honeysuckle was sweet in the air. No doubt the Invernish *Observer* could hardly be regarded as a supreme authority; nevertheless, type is type; and there are agencies for snipping out and forwarding to these anxious aspirants any newspaper mention of them. The tragic thing is that no similar agency exists for guaranteeing that none such paragraphs, of whatsoever kind, shall enter a private person's house.

Then he had grown less shy and apprehensive in manner; modest he always was, and desirous to please, but his glance was not now so painfully alert; in short, he was feeling a little more at home; while his extensive reading and his judgment in bookish affairs gave him a certain position. Moreover, he had incidentally been introduced to one or two of Miss Eelin's companions and to their occupations and diversions; Lily Neile, for example, would bring along her brother; and these four (when MSS. and magazines had been deposited on a window-sill) would make experiments in croquet—a game that had just been revived after sleeping peacefully for a generation. And the favouritism shown by this young newspaper-man—and the wild excuses he had to make in consequence! If Eelin and he were on opposite sides—for some such distressing arrangement would occasionally happen—and if she were lying in a good position at her hoop, and if he could easily have gone down and driven her away, he would deliberately do something else; and then as a kind of afterthought he would by way of apology say to his indignant partner, "Well, yes, perhaps I ought to have gone down to her." And then

the intentional misses—when it was Eelin who was his enemy! Lily Neile was a most good-tempered, not to say a hilarious, lass; but sometimes she got angry, or pretended to be angry.

"You two," she said, one afternoon, to her chief girl-friend, "ought always to play on the same side, and then we might have an honest game. He simply won't croquet you! It's disgraceful. See how I am handicapped!"

And then Archie Gilchrist, suspecting that remarks were being made about him, came up blushing and confused, and stammered forth an apology.

"Did you ever see anyone play so badly? I'm not sure that the lawn is quite even just there. The roots of that lime-tree may run a long way underground—"

At which Lily Neile burst out laughing.

"The roots of a lime-tree!" said she. "Mr. Gilchrist, you know perfectly well that you deliberately missed that ball. I saw you do it!——"

"Yes, you saw me miss the ball," said he; "but the intention is a very different matter——"

"You are always playing into her hands: it isn't fair," contended the irate damsel (but she was giggling, for she saw that Eelin did not like this too open accusation). "And next game I must have my brother for my partner; then you two can nurse each other as much as ever you like."

The awkward feature of the whole situation was this, that these two, Archie Gilchrist and Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave, had for a long time back been alternately love-making and jeering at each other in the columns of the Invernish *Observer;* but now, when the

Saturday came round, "Fairfax" was discovered to have grown exceedingly respectful, as if he were addressing a real person. Eelin promptly perceived the danger.

"Mummie," said she, with a copy of the paper in her hand, "I can't have this at all, you know. If Mr. Gilchrist is to come here, he must understand, and remember, that 'Fairfax' and 'White Cockade' are quite imaginary people—who never existed; and the way they have been talking at each other has also been quite imaginary — of course — certainly — obviously — quite imaginary—quite——"

"Are you only finding that out now, Eelin?" the mother asked, with calm scrutiny. "I told you long ago that all that farrago about assignations at the Islands would become rather compromising if you were to meet the young man in actual life——"

"Ah, but I won't have it!" said Eelin, with unusual perturbation. "There must be a distinct understanding. All that nonsense that has been going on was between two ghosts; and has nothing to do with him or me. Of course not! And if 'Fairfax' chooses to be timid, and complimentary, and courteous, why, it's his own look-out!" she continued, with more spirit. "I'm not going to spare him—not I! I will hew and hack at him! I will cure him of his John Knoxes, and his Fairfaxes, and his Cromwells——"

"Oh, no, you won't, Eelin. He seems to me a most amiable youth——"

"Now there you are again, mother!" the girl cried, with some little touch of shamefaced colour. "You are assuming that the newspaper people and the real people are one and the same; whereas they are not—and never

could be. The young man who comes here is a very nice, quiet boy, as distant in speech and demeanour as could be wished; and besides he is so very clever, and well-informed: why he can tell you everything! Very nice, and very interesting. Only, he must distinctly understand that he has no relationship with me handed over from 'Fairfax'—however respectful 'Fairfax' may choose to become."

"I thought you might find some difficulty," said the mother, regarding her.

"Oh, no, there must not be," the girl said, with decision. "There must be a clear understanding. I will tell him, the very next time he comes out, that 'Fairfax' must remain 'Fairfax': a very slight hint will be sufficient. For, of course, I don't want to quarrel: he himself is really a very nice boy—such an interesting companion—so unlike other young men: don't you find him so, Mummie?"

"Oh, I like him well enough," the mamma said, rather more cautiously: the whole position of affairs puzzled her.

Nor was it quite so easy as Eelin had thought to warn this young Archie Gilchrist that he must in nowise consider himself to be the inheritor of the rights, privileges, and immunities arrogated to himself by the imaginary "Fairfax." For the real young man never presumed one hair's-breadth in that direction: on the contrary, although she had got to be in a measure dependent on his advice, he was careful always to preserve a certain attitude of deference—to Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig. And how could she complain that the ghostly contributor to the newspaper should be showing himself

respectful to her other, and ghostly, self? The only way to clear up this somewhat perilous atmosphere was for "White Cockade" to attack him boldly in print. She would show him what she thought of his William the Thirds! She would sound the gathering of the clans; and fight the old battles over again; and lament fallen fortunes; and raise her glass to him beyond the seas! There was to be no more fanciful love-making; no preconcerted meetings out at the Islands; no secreting of envelopes in the first ash-tree east of the Priest's Well. Who was this "Fairfax," with his Whigamore sentiment, and his "Declaration of Impudence", "A man's a man for a' that?" At all events she would make it clear that his extreme courtesy was wholly thrown away upon the person signing herself "White Cockade," who was resolved to maintain the freedom of her opinions and prejudices and habit of speech as unrestricted and inviolate as ever.

On one of these golden afternoons Archie Gilchrist —the real and actual person—walked out to Glengarva House; in his pocket there was the completed story of the doctor who, to revenge himself upon society, joined a gang of burglars. It was rather a wild afternoon: during the previous day and night there had been rain up in the hills, and now the river was roaring down in purple spate; moreover the blustering gale from the south-west had not subsided; but Miss Eelin had pegged down and erected a canvas tent between the black-green araucaria and her honeysuckle bower; and in this sheltered nook her mother and herself were able to follow their usual occupations, while at any moment they could look abroad on the swinging current, on the row of trees

that were tossing and straining their branches in the gusts of wind, and on the brilliant garden-plots, where the nasturtiums, and carnations, and asters, and pansies white, purple, and pale yellow, were driven down by the breeze, and would then recover themselves, and sway, and bend, and become erect, in rather a joyous manner, in the successive floods of sunlight. And here it was that Archie Gilchrist found the two ladies; and they greeted him with a most kindly welcome; they gave him tea, and cake, and fruit; and they begged him to read to them the conclusion of the doctor-burglar story, with which they professed themselves delighted. As for him, their praises did not cheer him much. He was rather down at heart. The cessation of co-partnership, so far as this little story was concerned, seemed to foreshadow the end. He had been too fortunate. He had been placed on too friendly a footing. Well, if he was to be relegated back to a distant acquaintanceship, he was not going to repine or reproach—certainly not the latter. He would accept with submission; and be grateful enough for what had already been vouchsafed him. For he was not a presuming lad.

Of a sudden the glare at the mouth of the tent was darkened by a figure; and a maidservant announced Dr. Gillespie. And as the corrosion of slavery is not easily eliminated from any human system, a pang of contrition and remorse shot through Archie Gilchrist's nature: here was his master; and he had been caught idling; it was as if Struthers had unexpectedly come in and found him dreaming of a line in Horace instead of attending to day-book and ledger. But this master was not as the other master; he betrayed no surprise on discovering his

employe fleeting the time away in this pleasant company; nay, "after salutations," when he perceived the roll of MS. lying on the small garden-table, he hinted that a little bird had whispered to him of a certain collaboration, and he hoped that the two writers who had for so long been attacking each other in the columns of the Invernish *Observer* would find their advantage in working together in peace and amity.

"Oh, but understand, Doctor," said Miss Eelin, as she poured out some tea for him, "those two people are not known here. We don't recognise them. They can continue to squabble if they like—and doubtless they will. We don't even mention them. They are not of our set."

Now whatever Miss Eelin Macdonald said or did was right in the eyes of the bland, fresh-coloured, silver-haired Doctor, who was smiling so benignantly upon her over his gold spectacles; and he fell in with the mystification, and made no further reference to the newspaper combatants; but none the less he betrayed some little curiosity about the MS. before him. What had his assistant-sub-editor and his young friend the Daughter of the House of Kinvaig been about, when they laid their heads together?

"Well, I'll tell you all about it," said Eelin, with her usual bold frankness. "That is a small imaginative piece—a piece of fiction. The original idea was Mr. Gilchrist's; but as I have had something to do with the shaping of it, you will at once perceive that it must be a work of resplendent genius. You will admit that, of course. Very well. So far, good." The familiar, not

to say the irreverent, way in which this slip of a girl treated so august a personage as the proprietor and editor of the Invernish *Observer* almost shocked Archie Gilchrist; but then he was not altogether used yet to Wild Eelin's ways; nor did he know that the good-natured Doctor had considerably spoiled her by much petting. "The worst of it is," the young lady continued, "that now we have completed this work of genius, we don't quite know what to do with it; and mamma wants a five-pound note for her Convalescent Home; and it has just occurred to me, my dear Doctor, that you might take the story for the *Observer*."

She was laughing at him—expecting confusion; but the shrewd and good-humoured Doctor was not easily put out. He affected to consider her proposal gravely.

"Yes? Well, now, five pounds is not a large sum—not a large sum—not at all: I think that is what was paid for another notable potboiler—"

"A potboiler!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"I am talking of the 'Ancient Mariner,'" he said, with an innocent air. "I think that is what Coleridge and Wordsworth got for the Rhyme, when they were away on some excursion or other, and found themselves hard up——"

"I thought that the Rhyme was Coleridge's and that the Excursion was Wordsworth's," she said; but he paid no heed to her ribaldry.

"However," he continued, "this is doubtless a much more important production—"

"I have told you it is!—"

"Yes. Quite so. And I am obliged to you for the

offer. But hitherto we have not published any serial story in the *Observer*—"

"You should march with the times, Doctor!" she cried again. "Why, nowadays there is fiction everywhere!"

"That also is true," he replied to her, with much suavity. "There is fiction everywhere—but especially in the political rumours that come from Vienna. However, my main objection to using your story in the *Observer* is that I should be introducing a new feature that would have to be a permanent feature; and where could I find subsequent tales of equal merit? Impossible!—"

"Oh, now you are taking a harmless bit of fun seriously!" she said, pretending to be much hurt. "That's not like you, Doctor. That's rather mean. And if this little tale isn't a great work of genius, at least it's good enough for the readers of the Invernish *Observer!*"

"That I am sure of!" he answered her, impressively —though he was not in the least deceived by her offended manner. "And as regards the five pounds for the Convalescent Home, well, my dear Miss Eelin, that might be come at without disturbing the old-fashioned traditions of a country newspaper."

He put his finger and thumb into his waistcoat-pocket; but at this point the gentle mother interposed, with more than her usual decision.

"No," said she, "I will not have my guests treated in this way. I will not have blackmail levied in my house. Don't pay any attention to her, Doctor: they must dispose of the manuscript as best they can."

Doctor Gillespie and Archie Gilchrist, when this visit

was over, walked back into the town together; and the former was most friendly.

"When are you off for London?" said he.

"For London?"

"Yes. Every young man of literary ability and ambition has his eye fixed on London. To conquer London, or die—that's the watchword."

Alas! of late he had not been thinking of London at all. The visionary towers of Westminster Abbey had disappeared from the horizon. Rather he had been considering what was to be done with a broken and hopeless and useless life when the inevitable should happen, as it was bound to happen.

"It is a bold ambition," continued the good Doctor; "and too often it leads to long heartache and ends in failure; but for the one who succeeds the triumph is splendid. I suppose you'll try. There's something in your writing that tells me you'll try. There's a largeness of atmosphere—as if you were addressing a wider audience than Invernish: I think that sooner or later 'the terrible city' will draw you towards it. In that case I could give you some help, perhaps. We shall be sorry to lose you; but if it should come about—if 'the terrible city' should eventually get hold of you—then a few letters of introduction could do you no harm."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Archie Gilchrist. And it was all he could say. He was in utter perplexity—without plan or purpose; his mind a chaos; his future a matter of almost unconcern. It is true, in these later days he certainly appeared to have fallen among friends; but none the less was he distraught and wretched and downcast; he began to understand better

the incoherent messages left behind by this or that young man or young woman who had bade good-bye to the world and plunged into the unknown. Love-madness is sometimes said to be a mere invention of the poets. There were suicides from hopeless love and from disappointed love thousands of centuries before any poet was ever heard of.

Then there came an evening. He had been away out among the wilds and hills, perhaps seeking to find in their tranquil beauty and their silence some relief from the passionate unrest within his own bosom. Was it, then, to be London, and a wild dash for fame, and someone, not wholly uninterested, hearing of his renown? Or the Cape Mounted Rifles, and severance for ever, and forgetfulness? Or to go on and endure, letting an occasional moment of rapturous gratitude—for a look or a smile—compensate for long days and nights of despair? These were anxious and conflicting questions; and meanwhile the twilight had deepened to dusk; the trees along the river bank and on the wooded heights had grown dark; and dark also were the pathways and the hedges and walls; though the broad surface of the stream was still of a cold and steely hue, and in the west there was a waning silver-grey barred by heavy swathes of purple cloud. He heard voices borne far across the wide water: a trembling orange ray spoke here and there of a window being lit up. For now he was aimlessly returning home, with but little assuagement of his misery.

He did not notice, but gradually and stealthily the world around him was being transformed. Over the

black foliage certain fleecy clouds had caught a suffusion of faint saffron radiance; the wide pastures had grown to be of a phantom grey; the mists were visible along the hills; if he had looked, he would have seen that he was now casting a shadow. And at length this new presence around him became so pronounced that he could not choose but have his attention drawn to it; he turned his head to ascertain; and behold! there was the full moon shining through a filmy haze, over the ebon masses of the woods. All the distant sounds were hushed now; the dominion of the night had begun—with the Empress of the night set high on her pale and mystic throne.

By this time he had arrived at the point where the garden surrounding Glengarva House abuts on the open fields; and he was just about to go through the little turnstile, to continue on his route into the town, when he perceived that someone was approaching from the other side. Well, it was none other than Miss Eelin Macdonald; for she was in the habit of stealing out from the grounds and passing along the river-front to this convenient corner, where she could the better inquire of the upland country about the weather prospects of the morrow. He hesitated—his heart sick with fear; then he advanced to the turnstile; and she, having satisfied herself as to the look of the night, was about to get back within doors again, when she recognised who the stranger was. So she halted, and shook hands with him, and asked him what he thought of the sky—Lily Neile and she having some scheme for the next day. And then, of course, as he was proceeding along the river-

bank, and as she had to reach the gate of the carriage-drive before she could enter, they walked along together. It was a kind of inevitable thing.

The length of this promenade was simply the length of the front garden of Glengarva House—not over a hundred yards or so; and no doubt, in those few brief seconds, they talked the merest commonplaces. He did not know; and he did not care. Those honeyed words of hers could be recalled afterwards, and counted over, one by one, as a miser counts over his secret wealth. And in the meantime—that is to say, when they had parted at the gate, and when he had resumed his way into the town, between the glamorous grey of the river and the wan foliage and black shadows of the trees—in the meantime his brain was all afire with this new experience, and his exaltation was of a quite blind and delirious nature. For he had walked in the white moonlight with Eelin Macdonald; and to him it was as if, in the deeps of the forest, he had kissed Schön-Rohtraut's mouth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TIMEO DANAOS.

THERE arrived at Glengarva House a hamper of black-game—with Lord Mountmahon's compliments.

There followed a sixteen-pound salmon—with Lord Mountmahon's compliments.

Next came a haunch of venison—with Lord Mountmahon's compliments.

And finally there appeared upon the scene Lord

Mountmahon himself—gay, dauntless, self-assertive: a gorgeous kind of young man he seemed to be, with the resplendent button-hole in his Norfolk jacket of brown velvet: this was no shamefaced, timid, anxious-eyed student, humbly solicitous to please. The effulgent young man occupied the drawing-room, as it were. He dispensed his favours. And all his talk was of the forthcoming festivities.

"Never heard of such riot and revelry," said he, grinning in the most amiable fashion. "One's brain whirls. Let's see: what comes first? The Pony and Galloway races. I wish I had noticed an entry in your name, Miss Macdonald: wouldn't I have backed it? Yes, that I would! Well, there's plenty of other things for one to settle one's money on; and I imagine these wild merry-makings will cost some of us a pretty penny. The exhibition of Highland industries: I understand you have a stall there, Miss Eelin— —"

Miss Eelin (hotly resentful at being addressed by her Christian name: an old fisherman, a washerwoman, a young servant-lass—these and their like were heartily welcome to use the familiarity; but not this efflorescent person) Miss Eelin replied, in a somewhat cold manner, that she merely meant to assist.

"But your name's in the papers!" he exclaimed—and his bold and semi-bemused eyes kept regarding her and examining her with evident satisfaction. "'Homespun cloths: Lady Helmsdale and Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig'—I saw it in the papers! I can tell you there will be some purchases made at that stall! I should think so! Yes. I stand by my friends. That's just what's the matter with me. I don't know Lady Helms-

dale personally; but I know some of her people; Dick Baillie used to be a nailer at polo; well, I'll be at that stall; there'll be a purchaser at that stall; you mark my words; if all the people in Glengarva have to go squiring about in Harris tweeds—"

"It will be very good for the people in Glengarva," said Eelin—with rather proud lips; and then he interrupted her.

"Ah, but you know what I mean. It's your stall. I understand there's sometimes a little rivalry among you ladies; oh, yes; natural enough; and you like to see things going. Miss Eelin, your stall shall not be neglected. Don't you fear. You'll be kept busy with your little pencil and note-book—"

"I shall not be there!" said Eelin of the wave-blue eyes—and those eyes had a strange sort of wounded expression in them: perhaps she thought that her mother should have interfered to protect her. "I have given Lady Helmsdale all the help that she needs—"

"Eelin!" her mother protested. "You promised to take the stall until lunch-time!"

"Everything is ready," was the reply. "There is no necessity for me to be at the exhibition at all. Lady Helmsdale will have a shop-girl with her, to register the sales. There is no reason why I should go—"

"My goodness gracious!" Mountmahon cried. "There will be no attraction! Oh, really, now! What do you think I want with Harris tweeds? I was determined to make your stall the success of the show. And, of course I shall. Of course you must be there. It's your duty—to the cottars and crofters and all the rest of them. Of course you must go; and we'll make a shindy of it, if I

have to buy the whole counter. You just put my name down. Put my name down for anything you like. And they let you have afternoon tea, I'm told. I'll be there. Lady Helmsdale's shop-girl can run the sales: we'll have tea, and a look at the rank and fashion and beauty of Invernish. Then there's the Games—the kilted warriors of the north—bag-pipes—tartans—strathspeyes: of course you are going, Mrs. Macdonald?"

For a moment he turned to the mamma, who answered him—

"Oh, no. But Lady Helmsdale has been kind enough to offer to take Eelin with her——"

"Ah, Lady Helmsdale?" he said, thoughtfully. "It is clear I must make Lady Helmsdale's acquaintance. I must be of that party—if you will allow me, Miss Eelin—"

"Oh, but I'm not going," the girl answered, hurriedly. "I—I have seen the Highland Games often before——"

"But not as they are to be this year!" he insisted. "Oh, really, you must go! You see, besides the usual things, there are those gymnastic fellows from Aldershot—sword exercise—lance exercise—quarter-staff—vaulting-horse—all kinds of things: rather dainty it will be, if there's anything like decent weather. And I'll be of your party; yes, I will; I've only to tell Lady Helmsdale that I used to know her cousin, Dick Baillie, before he got broke to bits and bolted—an awful fool, to make a hash of himself about a married woman. Well, now, isn't there something about members' tickets—separate entrance—for I must know where to find you—"

There flashed upon the mind of the girl a dreadful

picture: the great enclosure—the terraced benches—the concourse of people—all her friends from far and near assembled—and these not failing to observe that Eelin Macdonald was submitting herself to the insolent attentions of this too notorious peer. And yet her mother did not interpose a word.

"Oh, there will be no difficulty," continued the confident young man—and he resumed his enchanted scrutiny of her features. "What I want I get. It's a way I have; and it's the only way worth having. You only live once. *Persistare* is my motto. *Persistare?*—no, it doesn't sound quite right; but what I mean is keep on and keep on till you get what you're after. You'll see how I'll chum in with Lady Helmsdale at the Highland Industries. I'll buy the whole stall—dashed if I don't. Women are awfully proud of that sort of thing: biggest sale on record: all cleared out. And I will be of your party at the Games—I mean, if you will honour me with your permission, Miss Eelin; of course, I mean that. I'll square it with Lady Helmsdale—don't you fear. I've got a way, you know. I don't like to boast, but I generally get what I want. In reason, of course. I don't cry for the moon. But *Persistare* is a good motto."

At this point his lordship was offered tea, which he declined; but when he jocularly remarked that a little brandy and soda was more in the nature of the medicine he was accustomed to take, that refreshment was provided for him; and he joyfully resumed:

"And now about the two ball-evenings: that's the great feature, of course; all the house-parties in from the shooting-lodges; swellest affair in the North of Scotland, they tell me. Of course, you'll be taking your

daughter, Mrs. Macdonald? No? Oh, still under the wing of Lady Helmsdale? Then I perceive it is more than ever imperative that I should get at once into Lady Helmsdale's good graces. Yes, yes; I can manage it. Sometimes people don't cotton to me at first; I am aware of that; I admit that; but very soon they find I am not such a bad sort. I am not one of the clever Johnnies; and I don't pretend to be; but there are worse sons of Adam wandering about this planet than I am. I'll put the blarney over Lady Helmsdale. I'll woolly-lamb her till she won't know where she is. And I hope, Miss Eelin, you'll be good to me. You see, I don't know many of the fair goddesses of these parts. I shall have to rely on you. I'll come early, while your programme is as yet a virgin page; and you'll give me as many dances as you can with decent propriety. I'm not greedy. I would rather sit out—if there's any convenient place for strolling up and down; or perhaps a corner in the refreshment-room."

"But, Lord Mountmahon, are you really going to the balls?" asked the gentle lady of the house. In truth she was shocked. How many weeks was it since this young man had been following the coffin of his drowned wife?

"Why, they tell me these two dances are the great event of the Gathering!" he cried. "And I've never been before. Always too busy—yes, crawling through wet heather after measly stags, and missing them all over the place. Now I want a little enjoyment. I like a bit o' fun; but crawling on all fours for miles at a stretch isn't fun at all. Not much. A precious sight worse than the tread-mill. And all the whisky in the

world won't keep the wet out: wonder it isn't a bee-line for Kensal Green. But this is different now—very different: youth and beauty, and a quiet chat in a corner: oh, you'll see if I don't woolly-lamb old mother Helmsdale—I beg your pardon, I do really—I didn't mean to be disrespectful—I don't know the lady—she may be as fair and young and fresh as a rose in June: anyhow, you may take it I shall be friends with her before this ancient universe is many hours older. Because I have a way, you know. Yes, I have. I hold on, till I get what I want."

There could be no doubt whatever as to what all this portended; and the moment the ebullient young man had gone, Eelin turned in a half-frightened, half-piteous kind of way to her mother.

"Mother, I'm not going to the balls!—I would rather stay at home with you. And as for the Games, I've seen plenty of Highland Games before. And the Industries—Lady Helmsdale can get someone else to look after the stall: it is rather insulting when any stranger has the right to come up and speak to you—before all the people. Mother, what does he want!" she went on —and the dark blue eyes were very near to tears. "Why does he come here—and send all those things—and wish for our acquaintance? I shouldn't have thought he was the kind of person you would favour. Mother, I hate him!—I loathe the sight of him. If he comes here again, I'll shut myself up in my room. I won't see him. He cannot make me see him—if I am in my own room. And I won't sit out any dances with him!—I won't go to the balls!—"

Now the gentle Bean-an-Tighearn had never thought

of formulating for herself any philosophy of life; but in her anxious forecasts about her daughter's happiness, she had ceaselessly inculcated the wisdom of tolerance —the wisdom of taking people and things as they are, not expecting too much, in short making the best of the only world which, for the present, we have the opportunity of using. And at this crisis, conscious of Eelin's vague alarm and distress, she began to defend the young man. How could anyone say that the stories told of him were true? How could she know that there were prize-fighters at Bridge of Kinvaig? There might have been at one time or another; and local gossip was a wild-running thing. Surely she must at least credit Lord Mountmahon with generous intentions? Not everyone was gifted with a fastidious taste. And so forth. Perhaps she was a little too earnest. Or it may have been that the girl, high-mettled as to physical courage as she always was, at the moment was unstrung nervously, and a prey to dim forebodings. She listened, almost without protest. But none the less a black terror, indefinable, held possession of her soul; she knew not what was before her, but she was overcome by an instinctive dread; and she began to have secret thoughts. She would not argue. She wanted to get out of the house—to be away by herself. And in time she did find herself free and in the open air: her eyes receiving no impression whatever from the wide stream, and the hanging woods, and the moving and changing sky.

She walked quickly into the town, and called at the Caledonian Hotel, and asked if Mr. Allan Macdonald were within. She found him seated in the verandah at the back of the house, overlooking the garden and the

river; and out there among the brilliant flower-plots a young lad was marching up and down with the pipes over his shoulder, while he valiantly played *I got a kiss of the King's hand.* But the moment he caught sight of the visitor, he changed his tune. His braggart stride became a slow and stately step; and the wail of the pipes was the *Lament of Macdonald of Kinvaig.* And it showed how unwrought and distracted the girl was that again the tears should have welled into her eyes. How many hundreds and thousands of times had she not heard the Kinvaig Lament!—and in the present instance it was only a sort of compliment and recognition. And indeed there was no faltering in her voice when she went forward to greet the tall old blind man who was seated in a garden-chair; and of course he could not see that she was crying.

"I am glad to find you at home, Mr. Macdonald," said she, right cheerfully—when he had held up his hand as a signal that the piping should cease—"because I want to beg for your advice. It's about a girl I know. I'm afraid you'll think her an awful idiot. She's a young girl—about twenty, I should say. And nobody has ever asked her in marriage. That's the joke of it. Nobody has asked her; and yet she's frightened; for she thinks she has responsibilities; and she thinks that somebody is going to ask her; and she has responsibilities. Perhaps I can't explain very well; but it's something like this. Suppose you imagine a young girl that has had twenty years of the most constant care and affection—day and night—constant love and devotion and thoughtfulness: well, don't you think she owes something in return, even if it took the form of a kind of sacrifice of her own

feelings? And suppose that her mother is the last representative of an old race; that she has valuable family relics, for example, that she might wish to see carried over to some famous historical house; and—and—if the mother expects the girl to make what is called a good match; and if the mother is so good and gentle and unselfish that she will hardly suggest it; but the girl knows what her mother is thinking; and the girl feels herself bound in honour to do something in repayment for twenty years of such extraordinary affection: surely she would sacrifice something of her own feelings—supposing—supposing that it was a marriage she had no liking for? Well, Mr. Macdonald, after all, you must consider that girl I have been telling you about a most silly idiot; for, you see, she hasn't been asked; and it may be mere vanity on her part—mere absurd and ridiculous vanity; and I am not wishing you to sympathise with her in the least bit. At the same time there are appearances—perhaps she is over-alarmed—but there are appearances; and what she is thinking of mostly is what her mother may expect of her—"

If the blind man could not see, he could hear; and there was a sound of sobbing; for this Wild Eelin who used to have such splendid courage had utterly broken down.

"God bless me!" he exclaimed, in consternation. "What has happened? What is happening?"

But she had a fine spirit. She pulled herself together. Her handkerchief was not long at her eyes.

"Well, I only wanted to ask if you ever heard of such a ridiculous idiot of a girl!" she said—and she affected to laugh. "A girl who hasn't been asked in

marriage, and yet is frightened she will be—and goes and worries her friends about such a vague possibility. I am sorry I troubled you about her, Mr. Macdonald. Girls take such fancies. And won't you tell that young lad to begin playing again. The *Seventy-ninth's Farewell* is the best of all of them. The *Farewell to Gibraltar* is the best of them all."

The blind man sate silent for a considerable time. Then he said:

"Miss Eelin, I hope you will not consider me impertinent. But I will venture to ask you a question; and you are free to leave it unanswered. Yes, it sounds impertinent; but I would like to ask you if you have had any visitor of late at Glengarva House—I mean, any newcomer."

She had wholly pulled herself together by this time.

"Oh, yes," she answered him, blithely enough. "Lord Mountmahon has honoured us by calling once or twice. He is the shooting tenant, you know, at Kinvaig—and I daresay the stories they repeat about his having music-hall people there, and prize-fighters, are exaggerated or inventions altogether. But we're not going to talk about him. No, no. I want you to tell me who this young lad is. He will make his mark. He has got the real thrill and tremble of the fingers. Mr. Macdonald, bid him play the *Seventy-ninth's Farewell.*"

"Ay," said the old man, slowly, "but if my son Somerled was here, that is not what young Andrew would be asked to play."

"No? What, then?"

"He would say to him: 'Andrew, you are playing

before Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig. Play *The Glen's Mine!*'"

CHAPTER XIX.

A SITUATION OF PERIL.

INDEED she was of a high-mettled kind. She squeezed the last tears out of the sea-blue eyes; she held her head erect; and as, in going into the street, she chanced to encounter a friend of hers, she hailed him with a fine air of good-fellowship. He was a drover—a short, thick, red-bearded man—and he had in front of him a lot of terrified sheep, three yelping collies, and two anxious young lads apprehensive of vehicles in this narrow thoroughfare.

"How are you, John?" she called to him. "I hope you are well."

"Oh, yes, thank you: and I hope Miss Macdonald herself is ferry well."

"I thought my name was Eelin—to my friends," she answered him. "But never mind. That's a fine stick you have, John."

"It's a good stick, this one," said he—but always with a concerned glance towards the huddling and crowding sheep.

"I think I could find you some employment for it," said she.

"Ay?—and would Miss Macdonald say what was her pleasure?" he made answer to her—but all the same

he was watching two farm-carts that were coming right down through the drove.

"Well, I should have imagined," she retorted, proudly, "that after all the years that you and I have known each other it would not be 'Miss Macdonald' and 'Miss Macdonald'! And I am sorry to have interrupted you. Good-day to you, Iain Ruadh!"

"Miss Eelin—my young lady—you're not going away like that!" said the distracted man—and therewith he called in Gaelic to the two lads, and he shouted to the excited collies, and there was a vast amount of gesticulation, and whistling, and frantic reproach, at the end of which, and in an amazingly short space of time, the nebulous multitude of sheep had been withdrawn from the narrow thoroughfare, and had been collected together, in a compact, circular, and quiescent mass, on the open ground that lies between the Invernish *Observer* office and the river-side. Wild Eelin laughed in approval.

"I never saw you do better, John!——no, not on any hillside in all Glen Shira!"

"And what will Miss Eelin be wishing with me?" said the drover with red-brown eyes and the shaggy eyebrows.

"I want to tell you a story, John. It's about a number of children—small boys mostly; and it's about a scoundrel who sells fruit and sweeties in this town; and he got a consignment of plums that he knew to be rotten—every one of them filled with maggots; and yet he tempted the children by putting out a placard of a penny a pound; and you can guess what crying there

was among the small people when they discovered they had been cheated."

"He was a mean man, that one," observed the drover, reflectively.

"And is that all you have to say about it?" she challenged him. "For, don't you see, the law can't punish him: at least I suppose it can't: there's no evidence —all the rotten fruit has been thrown away. And yet I think he ought to be punished—law or no law—"

There began to dawn on the mind of Red John some idea of what this was that Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig demanded of him.

"Aw, Cosh, Miss Eelin, would you like me to give him a weltin?" he exclaimed.

"That's a thick stick of yours, John," she observed, regarding it.

The red-brown eyes began to burn a little.

"Where uz that man? Will ye tek me to him? The sheep can bide here ferry well. And if Miss Eelin is of opeenion that he deserves a weltin—well, we'll see what can be done about that: we can try, whateffer."

So the proud-stepping Daughter of a Thousand Thanes and her friend the thick-set drover went away up the passage by the side of the *Observer* office, and crossed over Church-street, and followed down another lane, of a slummy character; and not a word did either of them utter, for Red John was clearly nursing his wrath. Then they came to a dingy little shop in the window of which were displayed shabby fruit and cheap confections; and they found behind the counter an unshaven, pallid-faced person, who looked rather frightened

when he saw them enter. He had reason for his alarm.

"Was you the man," said John, with his red-brown eyes burning deep, "that was selling the rotten fruit to the weans?"

The man glanced at the drover's stick, and knew what was coming; and instantly he made a dash for the small back-parlour. He did get inside the door: but he had no time to turn the lock, for the burly drover was agile enough; and the next moment both men had disappeared. At first there was only a scuffling and scrimmage; but presently came thud!—and thud!—and thud!—and wild protestations and desperate menaces—and again thud!—and thud!—and thud!—until Eelin grew frightened. Was a murder being perpetrated in there?

The door was opened, and the unshaven wretch was dragged out by the scruff of the neck.

"You will apolochise to my young lady!" said John.

"No, no," said Eelin, interfering with that air of quiet authority she could assume on occasion. "Let me speak to him." She turned to the craven hound at the end of the counter. "You richly deserve what you got," said she, "but if you wish to take proceedings I will bear the brunt of them. I alone am responsible. My name is Eelin Macdonald; and I live at Glengarva House—just outside the town—"

"By Kott, there will be no proceedings!" said John, vehemently, with his red eyes glowering at the fear-stricken fruiterer. "If there's any proceedings, then I will come back and give him another weltin—and mebbe a better weltin than that one—"

"At least," said the man, panting and shaking, and yet anxious not to lose an opportunity, "at least—there will be—compensation—"

"Yes," Miss Eelin replied, promptly, "there will be compensation—for those children whose money you stole: as far as I can find them out each one shall have back his or her penny. But as for you, you will get no compensation—from me. Good-day!"

So she and Red John left the shop, and returned along the lane, and then they parted—he hurrying off to his sheep, and she going on her way triumphant, for justice had been done in one small corner of the earth, and certain tiny friends of hers had been well avenged. She walked quickly, having much to do. First she called at the Highland Home Industries, to see if there were any more parcels for Lady Helmsdale's stall that might want pricing and ticketing. Then she looked in on Mr. Edel, and told him that an elderly gentleman, an acquaintance of hers, was staying at the Caledonian Hotel, who was much interested with everything connected with the Clan Donald; and if he, Mr. Edel, came across any old pamphlets relating thereto, he was in nowise to part with them until she had inspected them, for she might wish to make a present of them. Then she went into one shop after another, to order things for the house. Next she visited Mrs. Fordyce the grocer, and purchased considerable stores of tea and sugar (for she was rich now: no longer had she to wear the beggar's badge of Huntly Parish: Somerled Macdonald had emancipated her from that extreme need); and these she herself carried along to old Granny Sinclair, as an excuse for setting the room to rights and getting some fresh air in

by an opened window. These varied and busy employments may for the moment have banished certain fancies from her brain; at all events old Mother Sinclair declared she had never seen Miss Eelin look so well and bonny, and never seen her in such high spirits either, so gay and wayward and domineering was she. And again, when she set off for home—through the golden evening, with the tall elms shivering down silver-grey shadows on the smooth current of the river—she was making a brave show of herself, to herself. She walked with a buoyant air and a swinging stride. She persuaded herself that there was nothing else ringing through her empty head but the blithe lines

> "O say, will you marry me, Nelly Munro?
> O say, will you marry me, Nelly Munro?
> For guidsake, for ony sake, dinna say no,
> Or else ye may bury me, Nelly Munro!"

She watched a black cat—about as black as her own Beelzebub—creeping stealthily after a robin; and she flung a stone at it; strange to say (but she had acquired some boyish accomplishments) the stone did fall near enough the animal to interrupt its stalk. She found two small urchins sending a dog into the river; and she stopped to remonstrate with them; she pointed out that this was a salmon stream, and that to have a spaniel splashing about in the pools was not the best way of encouraging the fish to remain there; then, observing that her monitions had considerably depressed the two culprits, she gave them each a penny, and told them to go away into the town and buy sweets.

"But what sweets will you buy?" said she, with due regard to their welfare.

The one shock-headed brat looked at the other, and at length mustered up courage to say—

"Droaps."

"Ah, but what kind of droaps?" she demanded again.

"Acid droaps."

"That'll do," she said. "That'll do. Off you go; and leave the pools alone."

Then she came upon old Fergus, who was out in the water, and throwing a beautiful line with the Spey cast.

"That's a fine line, Fergus!" she called to him.

"No better than you can do yourself, Miss Eelin," he answered her.

"Oh, get away with you! But I don't see you catching any fish!"

"There's no luck."

"There's no salmon!"

"Ay, maybe that's the way of it," said Fergus; and again the long line came in with a slow side sweep, then there was a quiver of the top of the rod and a forward and upward stroke, and again the almost invisible thread flew away out, while only a practised eye could have told where the fly touched the water. She watched him for a minute or two, but nothing rose; so she resumed her route; and this one or that who knew her, and chanced to meet her—exchanging a smile and a passing word—they also thought they had never seen Miss Eelin look so handsome, and merry, and high-spirited. She seemed to go "singing on her way"—with all the audacious carelessness and happy vitality of youth.

But now a singular thing occurred. When she

entered by the gate, and went a little way up the carriage drive, she could see through the thick belt of laurel and holly that her mother was seated on a bench fronting the tennis-lawn, engaged in some kind of work; and for the first time in her life she paused and hesitated before going round to report herself; nay, after a brief second of shame and self-reproach, and with burning face and bowed head, she guiltily stole by unobserved and got into the house and sought the safety of her own room. What, then, was this that had come between mother and daughter—leaving the latter a prey to hidden thoughts? Why should she not have gone straight to the bench beside the tennis-lawn, and said frankly, "Mother, what do you mean by so earnestly defending that young man? What do you mean by it? What is it you expect of me? What are your own wishes and hopes?" But well she knew that that would have been of little avail. For whatever dim desires and projects might have been in the mind of the Bean-an-Tighearn, as the last representative of an ancient family, not one word would she utter that might in any way compromise her daughter's happiness. Eelin knew that well enough. Her mother would not speak. It was for her to guess—though this attack of nervous foreboding had not left her judgment very clear.

For indeed all that fine bravado with which she had sought to impose on herself as she walked home was a thing of naught. All the time, deep down in her mind, she was haunted by certain ominous sentences. "I generally get what I want": the phrase by itself is meaningless enough: not so the glance by which it was accompanied. "*Persistare* is my motto": another idle

phrase—but the significance of it, as he uttered it, was unmistakeable. And then her mother had deserted her; or rather had she not ranged herself on the other side, though her desires and expectations were as yet dumb? And what was demanded of the girl-descendant of the *Rex Insularum?* At the present moment she could define nothing accurately; she only knew that she was possessed by a vague, instinctive dread, and that the future seemed full of looming terrors.

And then she said to herself "Oh, this will never do! This will never do at all!" and she deliberately went to her writing table, and sate down, and opened her portfolio, and after a minute or two of thinking proceeded to continue a little paper she had begun for the Invernish *Observer.* It was entitled *Two Mites in a Cheese;* and it took the form of a dialogue between these personages, who with great difficulty had climbed to the summit of an eminence almost as big as a pin's head. One of them, it appeared, had invented a most ingenious instrument, called the phantasmoscope, which was capable of determining the composition of the various substances in the world around him, each of these substances, when volatilised, having its phantasm or arrangement of lines of various breadth; and this mite the first went on to argue that when he applied his marvellous instrument to other worlds, and obtained identical scrolls, it was a fair assumption that the same substances, in equivalent conditions, existed there as well. Unfortunately mite the second appeared to be of a somewhat sceptical turn. He demurred to the assumption. Then mite the first grew warm. He said that any mite that was a mite must perceive the clearness of the reasoning.

Mite the second said there was no reasoning; that the phantasmoscope proved nothing; that to assume that the conditions were similar in the other worlds, and to assume that these thick and thin lines meant the same thing in all circumstances, was an outrageous begging of the question. At this point (for their language was growing emphatic) Wild Eelin began to giggle; and all her troubles were for the moment forgotten. It was the scientific mite who had most completely lost his temper; and finally, when the discussion was like to have culminated in blows, he declared that he would contend no longer; that it was useless; that the mite had not the brain of a mite, but the brain of a misbegotten jackass, who could not perceive this great truth; and that he, mite the first, had triumphantly proved, had proved to demonstration, that the whole of the created universe consisted of but one element, and that that element was——. "What, then?" snarled mite the second. "Why Stilton, of course—you mitunculus!" And so the paper ended. It was a harmless bit of banter: not even the most sensitive among the scientifics—if any such were likely to come across a copy of the Invernish *Observer*—could have been wounded by it.

She folded up the MS., and put it into an envelope, and addressed it to Mr. Grieve; and then she began hurriedly to dress for dinner, which was early this evening, because she and her mother were thereafter going to the theatre. And she understood that Archie Gilchrist was to be present; and she had made up her mind that, if they chanced to meet, she would be most kind and gracious towards him; for he, at least, was modest, and intelligent, and respectful—not bold-eyed

and insolent. Curiously enough, and almost unknown to herself, she was absently wondering whether, under that shy apprehensiveness of his, there was a sufficiency of strong and manly character: she seemed to have an indefinable and anxious craving for alliance and shelter and protection—now that her mother appeared to her to have become in some strange way silent and reticent and apart.

CHAPTER XX.

AT THE PLAY.

It was at this time that Madame Grace Pinkerton, the celebrated provincial actress, brought her company to Invernish; by some means or other Madame had obtained an introduction to Mr. Tom Grieve; the sub-editor, having heard something of the pitiful life-story of this poor woman, hinted to his assistant—who had been promoted to the post of dramatic critic—that if he could say a friendly word about her in the *Observer* no harm would be done; and Archie Gilchrist not only undertook to do so, but went about mentioning the forthcoming series of performances, and enlisting sympathy and support; so it came about that the two ladies of Glengarva House had promised to be present on the opening night, though theatre-going was not much in their way. And whom but Archie Gilchrist himself did they first set eyes on, as they entered the large and gaunt building? He was in the front row of the stalls, next to the orchestra. Of course he was looking out for them; and his heart seemed almost to suffocate him

when at last he saw Wild Eelin at the portal; and his face was in a flame and his brain in a mad bewilderment when he rose and bowed to them, in response to their smiling salutation. And then he sate down again. He had not the courage to go round and speak to them, when they had taken their places. Or perhaps it was some kind of false pride that deterred him? If Mrs. and Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig honoured him by a certain measure of friendship in private, he was not going to parade the fact before this public assemblage. All the same his eyes were in the back of his head. It was little attention he paid to the ragged representation of the Bay of Naples that did duty for a drop-scene. He knew only that those two were behind him; he wondered whether Miss Eelin was scanning this one or the other whom he also could see; he was terribly anxious that the melodrama might not prove too preposterous; and he was stirred to fury by the tramping of the lads in the back benches, who were thus manifesting their impatience. Had they no manners, the brutes? He could have shaken them by the back of the neck, as a terrier shakes a rat. For it was at his suggestion that the gentle Bean-an-Tighearn and the beautiful and proud and haughty Eelin Macdonald had come to this unwonted place—to be insulted by these vociferous calls, and whistlings, and the stamping of feet. O that the play would begin—and prove to be even passable!

And at length the ragged curtain was raised, and the opening scenes of *Lady Annesley's Crime* were proceeded with. The melodrama turned out to be neither better nor worse than most of its kind—conventional

characters, forced situations, dialogue such as was never spoken anywhere by human beings; but amid all this rant and fustian there was one redeeming feature, and that was the earnestness of Madame herself, who played the leading part. She believed in herself; she thought she was impressing her audience; she was trying hard to infuse life and naturalness into all this wooden and mechanical stuff. Well, the critic of the Invernish *Observer* knew nothing of the art of acting; he had had no experience; but at least he could recognise the sincerity of this poor woman's endeavours; and he was resolved that the friendly word that had been begged of him should be more than friendly, if he knew anything of the English language.

Alas! while his vision was thus concentrated on the unreal and impossible world before him, the eyes in the back of his head did not tell him what was happening in the actual world just behind him. In the middle of one of the acts, the pot-boy-looking Lord Mountmahon had lolled into the hall, had cast a glance around, had discovered where Mrs. Macdonald and her daughter were seated, had gone forward to them with his most captivating grin and shaken hands with them, and then had coolly taken his place by the side of the elder lady.

"Heard you were to be here," he said, in his offhand, jolly, confident way. "Madame Pinkerton herself told me. Used to be a pal o' mine, before she went and made that hash of a marriage. Awful stupid to have no boxes in a theatre; she'd have sent you one —distinguished patronage, don't you know. I say," he continued, lowering his voice a little, so that Miss

Eelin should not hear, "I'll tell you why I came to-night——"

"I suppose to see the play," observed Eelin's mother, with some little asperity: she did not like being talked to during a performance.

"Oh, that?" he said, with a momentary and contemptuous glance towards the stage. "That's all tommy-rot. Awfully good of you to come here, you and Miss Eelin; but you needn't martyrise yourselves by taking that bosh seriously. I suppose the leading lady does; she's rather a stupid woman. Besides, she has to earn her living. I bought a dozen stalls, and gave them away; I fancy she's in rather low water at present; she made a desperate hash of her marriage. But what I wanted to say was this—are you much of a stickler for form, Mrs. Macdonald? Oh, it's quite right and proper; let's have everything proper and correct; and you'll find me doing everything fair, square, and aboveboard. They may have told you stories about me; but I'm not such a bad sort. And I want to see you privately, in your own house, for a few minutes. When would it be convenient, now? I like to forge ahead, you know. You only live once; and you mustn't let the other Johnnies get the best of you. Well, now, about to-morrow, my dear lady. What do you say about to-morrow? You couldn't give a fellow a snack of luncheon at one, could you? Immensely cheeky of me to ask you; it's what they call effrontery in books; but I like to forge ahead, and get matters settled. Especially important matters—oh, yes—an important event; and I want you to be on my side. You see, I have to go down to Glengarva by the afternoon steamer—three o'clock; but if you could give

me a snack of luncheon at one, then we might have our little private talk—"

"We shall be most pleased if you will lunch with us to-morrow, Lord Mountmahon," said Eelin's mother (but with such a whirl of hurried conjectures and imaginings as it is impossible to describe). "And one o'clock will suit us admirably."

"Ah, that's all right, then," he said, with distinct approval. "That's quite correct. First step secured, and the sooner we get on further the better. Don't you believe what they say about me, Mrs. Macdonald. People talk. The idiots can't help it. Their tongues will go. And if they found their tongues wouldn't go they'd drop down dead through sheer fright. And you understand what a fuss is made in small provincial quarters—people who don't know the world—who have never been anywhere—never seen anything—except their own back garden and a hymn-book. But you are not like that. You have lived in the great world. You know what life is: rather a mixed affair; yes, rather a mixed affair; but not so bad on the whole, when you make allowances. And if there's anybody that doesn't need allowances made for them, well, I've never met them. They're the saints, I suppose. But if you could learn a little more about the private conduct of the saints, you wouldn't be so cast down in suffering and woe. One human being is most uncommon like another human being—that's what I say. And the saints are just like other people, only they add on a layer of hypocrisy. Now that's shabby. That's mean. But it's only the jugginses that are taken in, and imagine the saints and saintesses to be what they profess to be. Of course it's all bally rot

—that's what I maintain. Human nature is human nature. I daresay I could be a saint myself—if I laid on the hypocrisy thick enough. Well, it's not my way. I want to be fair, square, and aboveboard; and they may talk about me until they burst; they won't find me answering them. But when it comes to a delicate question—as this is—then I hope allowances will be made: and not too much attention paid to the chatter of ill-conditioned gillies and dismissed housemaids—oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Macdonald!—I never imagined that you could hear anything of that kind—of course not!—but there has been talk. And I don't deny that I like a bit o' fun," he went on, in his airy and easy and complacent fashion. "I don't deny it. Youth will have its fling, you know—perfectly natural—perfectly right and natural; and I like a bit o' skylarking. I'm not denying it; but then, don't you see, if one had a better example before one, one might reform a little. In reason, you understand. Oh, yes, in reason. You don't become a reformed character right off the reel. That's not to be expected. But in reason. Oh, I tell you, I should rather like to try a little bit of reform. I'd go in for it. Yes, I would. Especially when there were other attractions that would repay one. But we'll talk about that to-morrow. One o'clock; and sharp to the minute is my motto."

Now Eelin Macdonald had not overheard, nor had she wished to overhear, this one-sided conversation; but none the less was she indignant that Lord Mountmahon should have before all these people seated himself by her mother's side and should so openly have neglected the play in order to monopolise her attention; and the

more ostentatiously, therefore, did she devote herself to the stage, to follow what was going forward there. And if her sympathies were entirely with this poor heroine who was striving so pathetically to make her tragic story seem real, they were soon to be called into still more active operation. For all the way through the performance there had been perceptible among a rabble of youths at the back of the hall a disposition to turn the piece into ridicule; and at the end of the fourth act, where the heroine mourns over the death-bed of her son, this tendency broke loose into a tumult of loud laughter. It was altogether a disgraceful scene; and Eelin's fierce wrath and scorn were in nowise lessened when she found that the pot-boy sitting next her mother was also sniggering. The cat-calls continued—the loud jeering and vacant laughter—the whistling to emphasise the derision of the pit; and at last the act-drop was prematurely rung down.

And then, a moment or two afterwards, there appeared before the curtain a solitary woman—a tall and handsome woman with raven-black hair. Her stage make-up did not conceal the fact that she was now intensely pale; she was trembling from head to foot; tears were rolling down her cheeks—perhaps she had been unnerved by her passionate efforts in the death-bed scene even before she had to meet this emergency. And this was what she said, in a broken voice, addressing the turbulent part of the audience:

"I am not angry with you. Pray believe me, I am not vexed with you. Perhaps you are right. Perhaps the play is not quite what you expected. I will not produce it again. But—but there is another act—but

there is another act; and—and I would beg of you for a little consideration. I ask you for a little consideration. As a woman—and very much alone—I appeal to you. We are all of us in this play doing our best to merit your approval; but it is not easy—it is not easy to —it is not easy——" And here the piteous sentences failed her; for a violent fit of sobbing had overtaken her: and with shaken frame, and with bowed head, and with her hands clasped over her face, the poor woman staggered away from before the gaze of this half-amused, half-ashamed crowd.

Wild Eelin's lips were white; and her eyes were brimming over; and her breath caught more than once as she took out her pencil and began to scribble hurriedly on the envelope that had contained the stall tickets. This was what she scrawled—with the word lash doubly underlined: *If you are writing about the performance to-night, I hope you will lash these cowards.—E. M.* And then she folded up the envelope, and got hold of an attendant, and had it conveyed to the gentleman who was seated at the end of the front row of the stalls. Archie Gilchrist rose, and turned round, and bowed in acquiescence to this demand. He could not, at that distance, perceive that the "eyes with the blue of the sea-wave" in them were all wet and shining; and, as it chanced, he did not notice that the notorious Mountmahon was engaged in conversation with Eelin's mother. The large hall was not very well lighted.

This episode occurred at the end of the fourth act; and of the fifth act Gilchrist, professional critic as he was, did not see very much, for his brain was simply at fever heat devising malignant phrases and epithets that

would burn and stab and rankle. For he had been angry enough even before the beginning of the piece at the unruly behaviour of those louts in the pit; but now his indignation was beyond all bounds; moreover had he not just received a command from Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig? The moment the melodrama had concluded, he hastened round to the *Observer* office, and at once plunged headlong into his diatribe. The beginning was cunningly calm and mild. "The ill-manners of the low-class youth of Invernish have long been notorious. In no other town or city of Europe" (Archie Gilchrist had never crossed the Channel; but phrases of this kind are part of a critic's equipment; they give him an air of importance and experience and authority) "could the spectacle be found of idle loafers lounging at the corners of the principal thoroughfares, occupying the whole breadth of the pavement, polluting the air with their vile tobacco and viler language, and not budging one inch when any lady approaches, on the contrary driving her out into the mud of the causeway." [He had seen the Bean-an-Tighearn so treated on one occasion, and he had resolved he would have it out with the boors sooner or later.] "But when these unlicked cubs come into a theatre to vaunt their ribald buffoonery, to make themselves an intolerable nuisance to the rest of the audience, to shamelessly insult the performers—and one of these performers an educated and accomplished woman, whose very existence depends on her winning and retaining the favour of the public—then surely it becomes the duty of the respectable members of the community to enter some kind of protest." And so he went on, the lashing becoming every moment more and more savage, until he

had to leave off in order to deal with the performance, and in that direction his language was just as kind and generous as hitherto it had been vicious and vindictive. Then away with the "copy" to the composing-room (for there was generally a driving rush on Friday night), with a prayer for a speedy proof: he could not have his vengeance postponed for a whole week.

It was Tom Grieve who brought the rough proof into his assistant's den.

"Here, Gilchrist," said he, "what the devil have you been about! Why, man, there'll be a riot in the town! They'll burn down the whole building! I really can't let this go in."

"If you don't," said Archie Gilchrist, serenely, "I'm out and off from this office to-morrow—for good."

"Oh, don't be a fool!"

"I mean it."

"Wonder what the Doctor'll say," observed the sub-editor, looking ruefully at the damp ribbon of paper.

"The Doctor will say it was well deserved," said Gilchrist, "when he comes to hear Miss Macdonald's account of the affair."

"Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig?" said the sub-editor, regarding the younger man curiously.

"Yes."

"Oh, she was there, was she? And perhaps she inspired this hot-blast of fury?"

Gilchrist would not answer.

"I suspect that's it. She's given to impetuosities. I rather imagine she put you on to this. Well, I suppose I must chance it: she's a particular pet of the Doctor's."

And thus it was that early on the next morning, Miss Eelin, who had been up and out and strolling along the river-bank, in her eager expectation of the messenger-boy, got hold of the Invernish *Observer;* and with her heart exulting she read the fierce denunciation of those brutal and illiterate louts; and she fled swiftly up to her mother's room, waving the newspaper above her head.

"Oh, Mummie, it's splendid!" she cried. "You never read anything so splendid! I knew he would give them what for! And I must ask him out to luncheon this very day—to thank him."

Her mother turned round from the dressing-table at which she was sitting.

"Eelin, do you forget? I told you last night Lord Mountmahon was coming to luncheon to-day."

"And well?" said the girl, with an instant change of manner. "At least Mr. Gilchrist will not have a retinue of music-hall singers and pugilists hanging about the gate and waiting for him."

"Eelin, you distress me!" the mother said, in a pleading kind of way. "What can you expect your life to be if you take such violent prejudices—if you will not make allowances for people—if you will not give them credit for trying to amend their ways? I wish you could have heard what Lord Mountmahon had to say about himself last night. If only you could be a little more charitable!"

"Then I am not to ask Mr. Gilchrist to come to luncheon?" Eelin said, rather proudly.

"Yes, you will ask him—as I see you wish it," her mother answered her.

And then the girl—but somewhat slowly and thoughtfully—went away to her own room, to write out the note of invitation. It was a strange kind of thing, but she seemed to be summoning to her an ally.

CHAPTER XXI.

"CAM' SEEKING ME TO WOO, O!"

THERE was an ominous gloom preceding this luncheon. The leaden morning had turned to rain—a solid, heavy, steady downpour; the trees stood erect and motionless, not a leaf stirring, as if they had been moulded out of some sombre metal; all the colour had gone from the world; the river was dark and drumly; the houses, roads, embankments displayed the same melancholy hue; the impending heavens were livid and featureless, and bearing down on the earth as with the obscuration of an eclipse; the distant woods, and the cultivated uplands, and the higher hills beyond had almost disappeared behind the watery veil. Not a bird chirped in the bushes; the sea-gulls had all fled away back to the Moray Firth; the patient oxen out in the fields had drawn nearer to the hedge at the end of the garden, but indeed there was little shelter for them. The dining-room was dismal, wanting its usual display of flowers.

And yet, as the forenoon wore on, the loftier slopes of the Castle hill seemed to be looking at something afar off—seemed to be conscious of some light somewhere; there came a warmth into the grey-white tone of the skies, wet as they were; in time there was a faint suggestion of silver here and there as the rain lessened

and lessened; the blackbirds began to "click-click!" in the laurel bushes; over by the Devil's Kirn, under the drooping rowans and alders, one could almost have imagined that a trembling ray of sunshine had wandered down to touch the stealthy current; the air grew milder and more mild to the cheek; the skies were lifting; here and there a streak of faint turquoise blue declared itself overhead; a stirring of southerly wind went through the leaves, and they seemed to be shaking themselves dry; and at last, with the Castle hill lighting up to a rich golden-green, and with a shivering of diamonds on the river, and with a universal jubilation in hedgerow and shrubbery, the splendour burst forth, and spread far and wide, while a rainbow spanning the Black Isle announced the retreat of the storm.

And with the breaking up of the heavens and the announcement of a glorious day there simultaneously entered the drawing-room of Glengarva House a young man, himself effulgent, radiant, and jocoundly smiling; he was very smartly dressed, too, if rather in a horsey fashion ("well-groomed," Eelin said to herself contemptuously); and at once, when he had sat down, he began to entertain the two ladies with an account of various recent escapades and experiences of his own, which he appeared to regard as humorous. His talk was mainly addressed to Mrs. Macdonald—who responded with the gracious courtesy she extended to everyone; but all the while his admiring looks were bent upon Miss Eelin, who did not quite so graciously respond. Of course, when he spoke to her direct, she had to turn to him; and he seemed perfectly unaware that the measured civility of her manner and the calm observa-

tion of her eyes indicated only too clearly the immense distance that lay between him and her. The proud beauty of her features, the somewhat haughty expression of the lines of her lips, in nowise abashed him; nay, they rather attracted him; they tantalised him: this jade was worth the winning! And so he went on—after his apologies for having come too early: beaming he was, and self-satisfied, and happy, and facetious: he knew he was a devil of a fellow to fascinate the other sex. But how quickly her demeanour changed when there appeared at the door of the drawing-room a tall, broad-shouldered, fair-haired, uncouth-looking student, whose apprehensive shyness seemed to precede him as he advanced. And of course she was the first to meet him and welcome him; and now it was——

"Oh, Mr. Gilchrist, how grateful I am to you! You have said in the *Observer* just what I was thinking! Will they see it, do you think?—the oafs—the cowards—to insult a woman like that! It was so kind of you! And I hope the writing did not keep you up too late!"

At this moment the mamma interposed, to introduce her guests, and with a single glance the two men seemed to take the measure of each other; then they all of them trooped into the dining-room, and took their places—a *partie carrée.*

And again Wild Eelin showed clearly enough in which direction she was determined to bestow her favour; for she turned aside from the continuous and complacent egotisms of the young peer, and did her very best to amuse her other neighbour. Nor was it difficult; for he was a quickly responsive audience; his low, quiet laugh

followed her through her merry cantrips; and merry indeed she was, with all sorts of reckless paradoxes, and mischievous inventions, and impossible stories. Is it true that any Englishman ever remonstrated with an American for his interest in antiquities, informing him that there was nothing in Europe half so old as the American young man? Who was the American, on the other hand, who observed that the feature which had most impressed him in England was the gigantic forests, and, on being asked by an amazed Englishman what were these forests, replied—chestnuts? Which was the South American Republic that advertised in the newspapers, as an attraction to visitors, "Revolutions got up while you wait?" These mad things flew about; and Archie Gilchrist laughed, to himself as it were; and Mountmahon looked puzzled—but none the less did he direct adoring glances towards the wilful, wayward, nimble-witted lass who seemed to be filling all the atmosphere with playful summer lightnings. Nor did the warm and adoring glances escape the observation of the other guest; and well could he surmise what was portended by them: it was not for him to harbour any protest. Only, there came back into his mind a dim, strange, half-pathetic wish he had formed that his mother, the old woman in Dingwall, should for a brief minute or so gaze upon, and perhaps say a word to, this brilliant and beautiful creature who had for a season honoured him, and lifted him up out of his proper station, by an acquaintanceship that he knew must end. That his mother and Eelin Macdonald of Kinvaig should meet, and look upon each other—that was now the summit of his ambition; and thereafter?—well, the Cape Mounted Police, most likely,

and a haunting forgetfulness of the land of glens and hills.

Luncheon over, they returned to the drawing-room, and here again "White Cockade" continued her erratic flights of jesting and raillery and sarcasm, for she was in a gay mood; and if the droop of Lord Mountmahon's underlip showed that he did not always comprehend, nevertheless his delighted eyes could dwell on the animated colour of her complexion, and the audacity of her demeanour, and the handsome set of her head, even when it was turned away from him, as it generally was. But in time he grew fidgety: he looked at his watch once or twice; and at length he said—

"I'm sure you'll pardon me, Mrs. Macdonald; but you know I told you I had to leave by the three o'clock steamer; and if you wouldn't mind giving me a couple of minutes' quiet talk—out there in the garden——"

She rose at once, in gentle acquiescence; and Archie Gilchrist, not quite knowing what were the usages of polite society, rose also, and said he would bid her good-bye; whereupon Wild Eelin outdid all her previous effrontery.

"Are you going into the town, Mr. Gilchrist?" she said, in the most innocent fashion. "If you'll wait a moment till I get my Tam I'll walk in with you: I've a heap of things to do in the shops." And thus it was that the party was broken up—Mountmahon and his hostess passing out by the French window on to the lawn, where they could converse undisturbed.

"Gilchrist, did you say—Gilchrist?" asked his lordship, when they were out of hearing. "Rum-looking card. Too intelligent for a nob, and too modest for a

snob: should take him to be a kind of newspaper Johnny."

"Mr. Gilchrist is on the staff of the Invernish *Observer,*" responded his companion—who, poor soul, was all in a flutter: she guessed what was coming.

"Ha?—I have an eye, you see," continued his lordship, who was evidently highly pleased by the success of his conjecture. "I'm not blind. I can twig. And I shouldn't be surprised, now," he proceeded, more warily, "if there was something between those two?"

"Between—!"

"Yes: between your daughter and this newspaper chap: they seem pretty thick." He did not turn to her with this inquiry: he was pressing down a daisy or two with the toe of his boot.

"Oh, but I assure you, Lord Mountmahon, there is nothing of that kind at all—oh no!" the mother said, with perhaps unnecessary emphasis. "Mr. Gilchrist is quite a recent acquaintance. But Eelin and he have much in common—literary schemes, and so forth; and they see a good deal of each other, no doubt; but there is nothing beyond that—"

"Well, now, my dear lady, let's have it out," he said, with a sudden burst of frankness. "If there's no one else in the way, I want to make your daughter my wife; there's the truth plump and plain; fair, square, and aboveboard—that's my motto. And I must have you on my side; that's what I've come for to-day; it's to secure your help—your advocacy; you must be on my side, don't you see, and then everything will go as right as a trivet. Oh, I know there are objections," he went on—for he noticed that involuntarily she had glanced at the

mourning-band on his arm. "Too suddenly—too unexpected: that's what every well-conducted young lady is expected to exclaim; but supposing we take all that for granted, and come to business. Strike while the iron's hot—that's my motto. If a certain unfortunate accident is thought to be too recent—oh, well, it'll soon be forgotten; and I want your help, my dear lady—your persuasion; for there's no time like the present; you only live once; and if you let opportunities slip through your fingers, why, some other fellow steps in, don't you know—"

"But, Lord Mountmahon," Eelin's mother protested—and she was nervous and anxious and agitated, through she had clearly foreseen that this responsibility would be thrust upon her, "how can I do what you ask? It is far too serious a matter. Eelin must judge for herself: I dare not interfere. My life has been devoted to her: her happiness is my constant thought, day and night; and if any advice of mine were to be ill-judged, were to lead to some terrible disappointment, how could I bear that?"

"Oh, come, come," he said, good-humouredly. "Disappointment?—why—where—how—what? I would take pretty good care of her, you may depend: and I've knocked about; I know a trick or two; I tell you, she shall have the best of everything. And I'm not such a bad sort of a cuss—with a little reform thrown in; and that's what I'm bent on; yes, I am: make it worth my while, and I'll do anything—in reason. In reason, of course. Champagne, now: they do say I drink too much champagne, and that I'll have gout, and lumbago, and sciatica, and every mortal kind of tomfoolery, sooner or

later. Well, I'll stop now. Yes, I will. Excellent opportunity—a sufficient inducement. Not a drop more. Oh, I can practise self-denial when I choose; yes, I can: blessed if I drink another drop of champagne. Beer for breakfast: claret at luncheon; a good old port at dinner: and one or two whiskies and soda to finish up the night with—but not a drop of champagne. Then there's the fisticuffing crew: I'll have done with them; yes, I will; though it may be a tough job; they're a roughish lot; and if I drive them off they'll try to do me a mischief, I am well aware of that. But when youth and beauty calls, you've got to buck up; and I imagine your daughter wouldn't care to come into contact with such an unruly gang. Then there's my gee-gees: capital excuse for getting rid of those old crocks—horse-hair trunks that have been fostered on me when I was half-screwed. I'll retire from the turf altogether—yes, I will—anything to please her—when the engagement is settled—"

"But, Lord Mountmahon, you don't know Eelin!" the mother exclaimed.

"Haven't I two eyes?" he retorted.

"But—but——"

"No, no; no more 'but—buts,'" he said, with a most conquering smile. "You know quite well most girls would like the position; and she shall have me for her humble and most obedient slave. And I can look after her: you trust me. Ask anyone who knows me whether I can order a dinner or not; just ask them; can I order a dinner or can't I? And do you think I would lug her away to some foreign country, to stare at mountains and old castles? Not me! What do I care about mountains, or old castles either? A tidy suite of rooms at the Old

Ship at Brighton—fine October weather—a well-mettled team waiting for you every morning at eleven; that's my idea of a honeymoon; and away you go to the tootle-too of the horn—Lewes—Worthing—Eastbourne—anywhere; then a rattling good lunch; and back in the afternoon in plenty of time to dress for dinner. That's living. That's doing things well and proper. She'd be looked after, don't you fear. And I'm not difficult to get on with. I call myself rather good-natured; yes I do. If she was late in getting ready, I wouldn't quarrel; I can pass the time first-rate; killin' flies with an elastic band would do——"

"An elastic band?" repeated the Bean-an-Tighearn; the happy loquacity of this young man had rather bewildered her.

"Oh, yes, don't you know? If the flies have been worrying you during your quiet snoozle in the morning before breakfast, or in the afternoon perhaps, you can begin and take it out of them: a tolerably big elastic band, and a little practice in firing will soon get you even with them. You can't shoot them flying—I'll admit that; but you've just got them on toast when they're walking about the table or settled on the wall; for they can't see this missile until it's on to them like a hundred o' bricks. Well, as I was saying, I'm easily amused. I'm not difficult to get on with. Of course, I know it's an awful lottery, is marriage. You never can tell whether the woman will turn out a sulker or a giddy prattler—"

"Is there no other kind of woman, Lord Mountmahon?" his companion asked.

"Yes, there is," he answered, with conviction. "There

is the woman who is a combination—who sulks to you and giddy-prattles to everybody else. However, we're not going to anticipate evil, on this auspicious occasion. For it is an auspicious occasion, isn't it? And you'll carry my message to the young lady; and you'll plead my cause; and let me have her answer as soon as possible. I shall be down at Kinvaig until Thursday next: a postcard—a sixpenny telegram—would send me into a seventh heaven of delight; and then, naturally, all the formal wooing could be proceeded with at one's leisure, when once the engagement was understood. Tell her, if I haven't got refinement—that's what they talk about as if it was a kind of religion—if I haven't got culture—that's what they call it—culture!—the Jugginses who don't know a horse's fetlocks from his withers—at least I'd stand by her in sickness: ah, wouldn't I, though! It's all very well of my uncles to talk of me as The Hog—pretty language—elegant language—The Hog: at all events I don't condescend to call names, or I might say something about them too—the sanctimonious humbugs—clinging on to the coat-tails of the sky-pilots!—put a penny in the slot, and out'll come a snivelling hymn! Well, I must be off: just enough time to get back to the hotel and drive along to the steamer. And you'll let me know, Mrs. Macdonald, won't you? A postcard—a sixpenny telegram—sent down to Kinvaig——"

"But, surely——"

"Now, now, my dear lady," he said, with laughing impetuosity, "I must stop all those "buts." If it were Miss Eelin herself, I could understand; the coyness and

reluctance shown by a young damsel is only a part of the game."

"I will take your message, Lord Mountmahon," said the mother.

"With a little persuasion added?" he interposed, insidiously.

But this woman, gentle as she might be and generously disposed towards all created things, was also scrupulously honest.

"I—I cannot pledge myself," she said, trembling the while.

"But you'll do your best for me, won't you?" he said, confidently. "And I shall be looking out for the telegram, don't you forget! Happy is the wooing that isn't long a-doing—that's my motto. And the young lady can be as coy as ever she likes; and I'll be as patient a lover as ever was seen—in reason, don't you know—in reason: procrastination is the thief of time. Yes, and by Jove I'll miss my steamer! Good-bye, Mrs. Macdonald. I am relying on you, mind. If a girl turns out flighty, her mother can show her what the common-sense of things is. And don't forget about the Old Ship at Brighton. Tell her that: that'll fetch her: she'll be well looked after—you trust to me. Good-bye—good-bye!" And therewith he hurried away—leaving behind him a very miserable woman.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN ESCAPADE.

Now when Eelin Macdonald and Archie Gilchrist set off to walk into the town of Invernish it would have been hard to say which of them was the more embarrassed; but presently her sense of fun predominated; she knew that she had flung herself, as it were, on this extremely modest young man; and she knew also that it lay with her to rescue him out of his shyness. And so she said, with a most ingenuous air (the laughter in her eyes demurely concealing itself)—

"Oh, Mr. Gilchrist, I suppose you are quite familiar with the poems and songs of Hector Macneill?"

"Yes, indeed," he said, emphatically. It was an immeasurable relief to him to find something suggested about which he could talk with knowledge; for this crowning favour of hers had somewhat unnerved him; it had never entered into his imagination that Miss Eelin and himself would be walking into the town together—in the daylight, too—so that all folk should see.

"Well, I hope you will agree with me that he has never had sufficient recognition?" she proceeded—and the laughter in her eyes was decorously dying out.

"I am convinced of it," he said, with energy. "Burns gets everything, Hector Macneill nothing—I mean, from the literary world. But I can tell you this, Miss Macdonald, that among the working classes in Scotland

Hector Macneill is oftener sung than Burns. I know. I was a clerk in Struthers's, in Union Street; and I had to take the keys in the morning; and I could hear what the men would be singing to themselves, at their work in the early hours. Was it Burns? No, it was not. It was 'Dinna think, bonnie lassie, I'm gaun to leave thee.' Or it was 'Jeanie's black e'e.' Or it was 'Whaur hae ye been a' the day, my boy Tammy.' Or it was 'Come under my plaidie, the nicht's gaun to fa'.' And when one of the girls in the shop—Struthers being out—took to humming something, as like as not it would be 'I ne'er lo'ed a laddie but ane, and he ne'er lo'ed a lassie but me.' Bulk for bulk I say there's better stuff in Hector Macneill's songs than in Burns's. Ah, but it's little use talking that way; for every now and again, amid all the obvious insincerity, Burns comes out with a line that is like a flame—so true it is, and transcending. Who but he could have written 'O my love is like a red, red rose'—?"

He had turned to her; there was a tremor of emphasis in his speech—insomuch that she lowered her eyes; nor did he know that he was addressing her so earnestly until one of two small boys who were on the river-bank called out, in the vilest of south-country accents, to his companion—

"Oh, jist hear till him, Jock! They're laud and lass, thae twa! Fegs, they're no blate!"

And then Wild Eelin, with her colour consciously mantling—and extremely mortified that such should be the case—hurried on with the discourse.

"Don't you think," said she, "that it would be only

fair if an edition of Macneill's songs and poems were brought out—to give him a fair chance?——"

"Why, again and again I have thought of it!" he exclaimed. "Only, his literary baggage is not great. I have sometimes wondered whether Tannahill might not be added in to such a volume——"

"Why not?" she said.

"If you knew, as I know," he went on, "how deep in the hearts of the poorer of our Scotch folk lie Tannahill's songs—singing themselves there, in a kind of way——"

"Oh, but surely I do know," she protested. "Does not everybody know? 'London's Bonnie Woods and Braes'——"

"And 'Jessie, the Flower o' Dumblane'——"

"Ay; and 'Let us go, lassie, go, to the braes o' Balquither'——"

"And 'O, are ye sleepin', Maggie.'"

"And 'Gloomy winter's now awa','" she continued, capping him at every turn.

"And 'Thou Bonnie Wood o' Craigielea'—there were two of the girls in the shop could sing that very well as a duet—when Struthers chanced to be out."

"And then there's 'Barrochan Jean'——"

But at this he looked puzzled.

"Barrochan—?"

And then she took to laughing as she repeated the lines—

"'Tis hinna ye heard, man, o' Barrochan Jean?
And hinna ye heard, man, o' Barrochan Jean!
How death and starvation came o'er the haill nation,
She wrought sic mischief wi' her twa pawky e'en;

The lads and the lasses were dying in dizzens,
The taen killed wi' love, and the tither wi' spleen;
The ploughing, the sawing, the shearing, the mawing,
A' wark was forgotten for Barrochan Jean."

"Miss Macdonald—" said he, when she interrupted him.

"Mr. Gilchrist," said she, "I am going to ask you to call me by my right name. I am 'Miss Macdonald' only to strangers."

"Oh, it is so kind of you, Miss Eelin, then," he said, blushing very hotly; "we might bring out a volume combining the two poets—Macneill and Tannahill——"

"Why, that is an excellent idea!" she cried, gaily, as she swung along—and she seemed to be extremely happy—she appeared to have escaped from something—she was rejoicing in this companionship and its sympathetic communion of souls. "A plain, unpretentious volume, easily within the means of those who would appreciate it most. I think Mr. Edel would publish it for us. It would not be a costly venture. Then there would have to be an explanatory introduction, and a biography of each of the poets, and notes; I would do the one memoir—Hector Macneill for choice—if you will do the other; but of course your name alone would be on the title page as editor——"

"But why, Miss Eelin?" he remonstrated.

"Oh, well," she answered him lightly, "you are a professional, you know—you are a man of letters—and I am only an amateur——"

"Miss Eelin, you do not understand," he continued, anxiously, "for it will put clearer the relationship between you and me, while that lasts. I am not a man

of letters at all! It is only a matter of weeks since I joined the staff of the Invernish *Observer*. Before that I was a clerk in Struthers's shop. I wanted you to know—so that there should be no false pretences—and then you will not say that I had presumed, that I had deceived you—when—when you choose to pass on—"

"Pass on?" she repeated.

"Well," said he—and he was unmistakably agitated, "when the Queen, up there in the Highlands, at Braemar or Balmoral, stops some poor cottar or shepherd-lad, and says a few kindly words to him, it is nothing to her; it is merely the generous instinct of the moment; she passes on, and forgets. But as for him he has received the crowning honour and treasure of his life—its one memory to cherish and be proud of—"

Perhaps there was something in the tone of his voice; perhaps there was something of mere physical breathlessness; perhaps an unusual pallor in his cheeks; but at all events Wild Eelin came to consider that the situation was extremely critical—she hardly knew why. And she said to him, almost reproachfully—

"I can hardly guess at your meaning, Mr. Gilchrist; but if it is what it seems to be, why, was there ever such an absurd exaggeration! Where's your gospel? Where's your badge of liberty and equality? Have you forgotten that 'a man's a man for a' that'?"

He pulled himself up. He had achieved his object. He had given her to understand. He had cleared the ground. And if now she still wished to extend some small measure of favour toward him, good and well; but if the Queen chose to pass on without another thought

of the poor wayfarer, that also was good and well; and he would hold his treasure of remembrance, and be grateful with a lifelong gratitude.

"Oh," he said, rather shamefacedly. "'A man's a man for a' that' is more a definition of the attitude of a man towards other men—"

"Oh, is that it?" she said, mocking at him. "Then you cut out half the human race from the application of your braggart song? That is something, at least. That is a concession. Well, now, Mr. Gilchrist, be guided by me; and we'll cut out the other half; and we'll reduce that famous piece to what it is—not the expression of the sentiment of the human race, of half the human race, or any section of the human race, but the expression of a single individual's irritable and morbid jealousy and envy and vanity."

But at this he burst out laughing; he knew she was merely trying to make mischief—to pick a quarrel with him; and so all he said to this saucy damsel was—

"I'm glad we've got past the Castle hill."

"Why?" she demanded.

"Because it would have fallen on us if it had overheard."

By this time they were come to the Suspension-bridge; but she did not strike off at right angles to go into the town; she continued on her way along the river-front, so that now they were passing the open space into which Ian Ruadh had collected his sheep, while on the other side was the dingy black-grey bulding of the Invernish *Observer*. She regarded the lugubrious-looking square stone block, with its small dim windows.

"I suppose it is all shut up?" she said.

"Oh, yes," he answered her. "Not a soul in the place, I should imagine, on a Saturday afternoon."

"I have never been over a printing establishment," she observed vaguely.

"Oh, but if you would like to look through," said he, with an instant alertness, "I can easily manage that. The old woman who keeps the keys lives just across the lane: she would come and unlock door by door for us. What do you say? Would you like it?"

"I should like it immensely!" she answered him without a moment's hesitation: she was always ready for any kind of haphazard adventure.

And so, in a few minutes' time, these two were being ushered into a sombre passage leading from the lane into the interior of the building; at the end of the passage they found a corkscrew little stair, by which they gained the corridor above; and then the old woman with the keys proceeded to conduct them through the mysterious and silent offices, herself as silent as her surroundings. It was an eerie kind of perambulation. The long composing-room, in especial, had an aspect of absolute loneliness and desolation; not even a friendly ghost was there, standing at one of the cases, setting up imaginary type. As for the dark masses of metal in the engine-room, a still deeper gloom enveloped these; and there was a kind of threatening air about their cold and slumbering strength: they seemed to resent this intrusion upon their profound solitude and stillness. Sometimes Wild Eelin, who was an impressionable sort of young woman, drew back a little: she did not care to penetrate further into those gulfs of shadow.

And then the explorers got them away to the front

part of the building, which was of a more cheerful outlook; and here they took possession of Mr. Grieve's room, with its bound files of the London papers, its rows of books of reference, its atlases, manuals, dictionaries and directories, and, conspicuous on the writing-table in the middle of the floor, its tin canister of tobacco. Eelin, who loved the light rather than the darkness, quickly recovered her spirits; nay, when she had examined everything with the greatest interest and curiosity, she grew merry and mischievous; she would have Mr. Grieve know of this unpardonable visitation; she would leave a message for him, as from the land of spirits, and pin it on to his desk.

"What then," said she, turning to her companion, and fixing those glorious blue eyes of hers on his with a quite unthinking fearlessness of challenge, "what do you think? Rhyme? A little posy, with a knot of ribbon tied round the foot? It must be awfully clever, you know, to atone for our abominable impudence in coming into his room. And I'm not very good at impromptus," she continued, sadly. "My little jests are of the escalier——"

"I don't think you would find other people say so, Miss Eelin," he observed, smiling: indeed he had himself recollections of the shafts of summer lightning that she could send (herself giggling all the while) round an afternoon tea-table when she had been provoked.

"But begin, Mr. Gilchrist, begin!" she said, impatiently—and she sate down, and got hold of a writing-pad. "Tell me what to say—*Ode to a Sub-Editor found absent*—how shall we begin? *O wilding bird that for a time hast flown, from out—from out the downy*

shelter of thy nest, By what far streamlets flutterest thou alone, by what—by what—by what dim valleys in the golden west? Go on, Mr. Gilchrist—now you go on!"

"Not I!" he said, "when you are doing so magnificently!" But in truth he was hardly thinking of the sham poetry: rather he was thinking of the extraordinary charm and fascination that the mere presence of this splendid creature seemed to confer on these poor offices. Would the atmosphere ever lose this radiance that now permeated it? Would he ever, coming into this room, see anything but a vision occupying the sub-editor's chair —the vision of a young girl, gay, self-confident, serene, her beautiful profile bent down over the paper, the homespun jacket showing the perfect lines of her figure, the dark-blue Tam o' Shanter perched on the bountiful and bunched-up masses of her raven-black hair? And the pen that she held in her fingers: the moment she was gone he would come swiftly back and annex that: if it chanced to be some favourite of Grieve's, so much the worse for Grieve; he could not relinquish so personal a souvenir of this memorable and enchanting escapade.

And meanwhile Wild Eelin was beating her brains: She even bit at the end of her pen—making it a thousand times more valuable in the eyes of the future possessor.

"Why don't you help me, Mr. Gilchrist?" she said, peevishly.

And then he dashed boldly in.

"*How knowst thou, fluttering by yon western shore,*" he began.

"Yes?" she said, by way of encouragement.

"*Two raging cuckoos have usurped thy den—*"

"Oh that's ridiculous!" she protested; but he went on doggedly:

"Thy special writing pad they've scribbled o'er; And now methinks they'll steal away thy pen."

He had hardly uttered the words when an alarming crash occurred just behind him, and a large stone, hurled through one of the windows, came rolling to his feet. He wheeled round; the old woman with the keys shrieked and shrieked, as another and another missile came smashing through; and Eelin sat upright in her chair, her wide-apart, animal-like eyes all alert and observant—but not with fear. No, there was no trace of fear in the Juno eyes; but the proud and imperious set of the mouth had become a trifle fixed.

"Come back from the windows, Mr. Gilchrist," said she. "I know what it is. The rabble of lads whom you slashed at in this morning's *Observer,* have come to have their revenge; and they think there's no one in the building; so that they can break a few windows with impunity——"

"Oh, do they think that?" said he, with a hurried glance outside. "Do they think that?" His heart was ablaze with wrath. That the beautiful little romance of this afternoon's adventure—and even while Miss Eelin was pretending to write poetry in the sub-editor's chair—should be summarily brought to an end by the same young blackguards who had disgraced themselves in the theatre the evening before!

"Stay where you are," said he, peremptorily, "I shall not be long."

He dashed into the composing-room and looked eagerly around, but nothing in the shape of a weapon

could he find anywhere, until his eye lit on an old, broken cane-bottomed chair that lay in a corner, and that he took up and wrenched limb from limb, until there remained in his hands a most unholy four-edged implement. Then he went out. It was rather in a sneaking way that he passed down the lane. He professed to be paying no attention to this assemblage of unruly louts, who were doubtless greatly enjoying the amusement of breaking the window-panes of an empty building. But when he had got well to the rear of them he charged—charged like a whirlwind upon them: knocking this one down, hurling this one over, and then, whenever three or four were found together, the impetuous, promiscuous, irresistible belabouring began, with this godless instrument that seemed to have been invented for the crushing of bones. The fury of Ajax increased. His eyes were red-hot. The leg of the cane-bottomed chair appeared to be flying to all points of the compass, but invariably the end of the trajectory was the head or shoulders of the vagabond who chanced to be tallest or nearest. Those grubby masses of humanity parted—halted—retreated—scattered themselves—looking back in amazement none the less. For this onslaught had been so sudden that a general consternation had been produced before they had time to realise that they were being attacked by only one man. It is true some eight or ten of the cubs did form up at the foot of the lane; and it would have gone dismally hard with Archie Gilchrist if there had been stones about; but there were not—for the roadway here is of hard and worn macadam; and the hobbledehoys had exhausted the ammunition they had brought with them; so that when he went

straight for the middle of this group, they simply fell away from before him, to get out of the reach of that awful truncheon. And then of a sudden there was a warning whistle; someone had espied a policeman hurrying across the Suspension-bridge; and in about three seconds the rioters had vanished into thin air. When the policeman arrived there was no tumult to quell; but the windows of the *Observer* office presented a sorry sight.

Then he went back to the door in the lane; and who was this but Wild Eelin herself awaiting him—laughing and giggling and immensely delighted. As for him, he was a trifle breathless; and perhaps also a little ashamed of the violence of his rage.

"Well, that was a fine *millee,* as they say in the Lowlands," she called to him, as he approached.

"Why, what do you know of it?" he demanded. "Didn't I tell you to keep back from the windows?"

"Likely!—when I had a little Armageddon all spread out for my own benefit! Most interesting! I suppose a real battle is something like that—with a little more colour and smoke thrown in. But I must hurry on now, Mr. Gilchrist. I've torn up the lines to Mr. Grieve; I thought he mightn't understand. Good-bye; and thank you ever so much for showing me over the building."

And so they parted; and at once he went up to Tom Grieve's room, to secure the nibbled penholder. He did not immediately return, though the old woman of the keys was waiting patiently below. For this commonplace apartment had undergone a sort of transfiguration—since a young lady had been seated at that actual desk there, her blue-bonneted head bent over the

paper, her tones, merry, or petulant, or remonstrant, sounding strange—and yet so sweet and so entrancing—in the all-pervading silence.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FRIEND AND ALLY.

MISS EELIN'S shopping was soon over; and then in a casual kind of way she went round to the Caledonian Hotel, to inquire after her venerable friend. She found him in the verandah overlooking the fragrant and brilliant garden-plots; and a proud man was he—this great, white-bearded, blind giant, when he rose on her approach, and stretched out both hands to welcome her.

"It is kindly done of you, and more than I expected," said he, as she took a seat beside him, and made herself comfortable, while Angus went off to order tea. "I was just listening to the hammers over there—do you hear them?"

Plainly enough, across the wide river, came the multitudinous *click-click!* that told of the workmen getting ready the grounds devoted to the Highland Games.

"And I was saying to myself 'Yes, yes; hurry on, hurry on: it will be a gay week the next week; and of course Miss Eelin is just as busy with her preparations as the rest of them—ball-dresses, and tartan-sashes, and the like—and it's not to be expected that she'll have a thought to send in this direction.' And yet here you are!"

"Yes, here I am," said she, blithely, "and here I mean to remain, until Angus sends the tea. For I'm safe here.

Oh, it's a dreadful town this, Mr. Macdonald! There is no order or government; everyone takes the law into his own hand; and no one thinks of interfering. Why, I have just heard of a man having been beaten black and blue for selling bad fruit to children——"

"And serve him right!" was the instantaneous comment.

"Ah, there it is, you see," she went on, sadly. "There it is. That is the result of living in a lawless atmosphere. Do you know what I saw only a few minutes ago? Why, there was a whole rabble of lads breaking the windows of a house; and when the occupant came running out, what does he do? Send for the police? Not at all. He has got hold of a lump of furniture, and he goes smashing amongst them right and left—scattering them in every direction—a tall young man he was, and broad-shouldered, with fair hair rather long, so that he really looked like a Scandinavian berserker—a berserker gone mad with fury—and you should have seen how they fled like sheep every time he charged them. But I ask you, Mr. Macdonald, is this a Christian town? Is this the nineteenth century? Are we supposed to have some sort of government and means of keeping order? I wonder you should choose to live in such a place!"

"And will I tell ye, Miss Eelin," said he, rather gently, "what makes me like to linger on here, even when Angus and I have been planning other excursions?"

"What, then?"

"Well, just the chance of hearing a word of your voice, Miss Eelin—as at the present moment. Though I did not expect it this time. No, I did not. I thought ye would be all taken up with your finery for the dances—"

"Mr. Macdonald," she said, in something of a hurt way, "I wish you to understand. I don't want to go to either of the balls; and if I can find any reasonable excuse, I shall not go."

"Bless me!" he exclaimed. "Bless me! At your time of life—I thought they would be great events. And especially with all the old Highland families represented —and who with a prouder position than Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig?"

"Mamma has been very kind about my dresses," she continued; "and—and perhaps it would disappoint her; perhaps I may have to go; but I would much rather not; indeed, indeed, I would much rather come and sit by you, and read to you, those two evenings——"

"Miss Eelin, are you out of your mind!" he remonstrated with her. "You that must take your place, ay, among the best of them! And who will outshine her young ladyship of Kinvaig? Ah, but I've heard. I warrant ye, I've heard. You think a blind man cannot see; but he can listen—from this one and that; and he can make a kind of picture. Well, well, though I am not to be there, I know who will hold her own. I know who will have her card of the dances first filled. And if I must tell you the truth, Miss Eelin, I've kind of taken a little bit liberty. I just wanted to feel that I had a small share, the smallest share, in your splendour —for I know what's going to happen on those two evenings: I can hear. And you'll forgive me; you'll not think it impertinent; but rather the privilege of an old man; and besides something must be allowed for the pride of one's name. . . . Are you there, Angus?—Angus!"

Angus was not within hearing; but at this point a

waiter appeared, bringing along the tea-tray; and he was sent off in search. In about a minute or so—while Eelin was presiding at the little table—Angus turned up; and from his master he received certain half-whispered instructions and a bunch of keys; then he went away. When he returned he was carrying in his hand a flat box about eight inches square, covered in dark blue morocco.

And while Miss Eelin was busy with cup and saucer, old Allan Macdonald opened the jewellery case, and passed his fingers lightly and caressingly over the contents. These were a necklace and a small pair of earrings, apparently copied from an Etruscan design; the necklace consisting of a series of equal-sized golden shells, each pendent little cup containing a solitary diamond of purest water. That was the ostensible feature—a string of diamonds; but besides that, and between each two of the shells, and also pendent though by a shorter golden thread, there was a tiny blob of coral; the result being that there were really two circlets—the inner and thinner one of pale pink dots, the outer one the lustrous blaze of the cut stones. It was a pretty combination of colour—the gold, and pale pink, and white; while the naive simplicity of the design was not the least admirable feature of this beautiful thing, which otherwise might have appeared a trifle too sumptuous for a girlish neck.

When Eelin had given him his cup of tea, he handed over the open case.

"Miss Eelin, will you tell me what you think of that? Tell me frankly—quite frankly—for perhaps there's something else."

If he could have seen the sudden look of admiration that leapt into her face and filled her eyes, he would not have doubted much.

"They're good stones," he said. "I made sure of that. I went to both Edinburgh and Glasgow; and I had experts with me. Maybe I should have waited until Somerled came back; but then, with these two assemblies next week—Well, and what do you think of it, Miss Eelin—"

"It is perfectly lovely!" she cried—and the tone of her voice told him all he wanted to know. "It is perfectly exquisite! The gracefulness of it—the simplicity—and the beautiful colour—and the brilliancy——"

"Ay, ay, do you say that!" he interposed, eagerly, and in great delight. "Did not I tell you, then, that I wished to add my mite to your triumph, when you go among those people next week. 'And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift,'" he added, smiling at his own cleverness.

"Yes," said Eelin, regarding the radiant coil, "indeed it is fit for a king's daughter—but not for me."

"My dear young lady," said he, "you're going to make me very happy by accepting my little present, and not another word more about it. I told you it was an old man's privilege——"

"But, Mr. Macdonald, I am overwhelmed!" she protested. "How shall I ever be able to thank you—"

"Not another word—not a single word," he insisted.

"Will you let me send you a message in Gaelic," she said, desperately, "after I get home this evening?"

"Ah, yes, that!—yes, that—" he answered her, with

obvious satisfaction. "That, if you like—and if you think it is worth while, my dear."

So this matter was settled; and then they proceeded to speak of other affairs—chiefly in connection with the great events of the following week; but by-and-bye Eelin said—with a timidity and embarrassment that of course he could not perceive—

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald—I—I think you mentioned something about your son coming back to this country. Have you—had any news, then?"

"Plenty of news—plenty of news," he answered her, "but perhaps not quite so explicit as one could wish. You see, Somerled understands well enough that his letters to me must be read by a third person; and although we have a cypher-code between us, it is not easy to make everything clear about the railway matters without mentioning names; and then again it might be mischievous if information got into the papers prematurely. There's no one can overhear us?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"Not a soul near!" she responded.

"For there'll be a fine revelation out there ere long!" he continued. "The Lad has had it all his own way—indeed, he is a deevil of determination; and when the great amalgamation is declared, the wreckers will find their feet just cut from under them. But I must not trouble you with such things, Miss Eelin; I cannot expect you to understand them—"

"No, I only wished to hear whether your son was coming back soon—to keep you company——"

"Well, now, that's strange!" said the tall, old, white-bearded man. "For the Lad has got some daft idea

into his head that he would like to come over here and settle down for good—or perhaps merely rent a place for a year or two by way of trial—now that he can leave everything safe and secure on the other side. Miss Eelin, was I telling you that I did very well at Altnaharra, at the trolling?" he went on, with a bit of a chuckle. "Ay, indeed, the old doited blind body did better than the sharpest-eyed o' them all; and will I tell ye the reason? When the two rods are out at the stern of the boat, and when the trolling has begun, if ye chance to see that the point of one of the rods is trembling, it's just not in mortal man to refrain from snatching that rod up, and as like as not ye pull the phantom minnow away from the fish; whereas the poor old blind body is under no such temptation; he lets the rod alone until the fish has well hooked itself; and then the skirl of the reel is plenty of warning. And Somerled has been ever too busy a man to learn fly-fishing; but he could manage the trolling; and him and me might have many a happy day on one o' the Highland lochs. And yet I don't understand him. Sometimes he writes as if he would like to come; and again he writes as if he was afraid of this country. He's a strange lad altogether. Hard-headed in business as he is, he has queer, erratic notions sometimes; but they lie deep down. He is not a talker."

Old Allan Macdonald, at all events, was—when his son Somerled was the subject; and Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave listened with a concentration of interest which at least encouraged him by its silence.

"It's seldom that a young man of thirty can say to himself that he has done enough of the world's work to

leave him free to consider how he should occupy himself otherwise. Of course, he had a good start. I put him on a good platform. But I was getting old and losing my nerve; I could not have dared to do what he has done; and maybe I could not have got as many people to follow me. But he is the strangest rascal! Money he cares not one doit for, except as an instrument. Success and power he has striven for—and won; but piling up money as an end in itself, that he passes by as futile. And so, my dear young lady, if you should ever hear of that boy of mine doing something that sounds rather wild, do not you think that he has lost his wits. It may sound eccentric; but there will be a reason in it, sufficient for himself, at anyrate; and that's all he cares for. I suppose that's all he cares for. If he were to do some splendid thing, some magnanimous thing, as like as not he would keep himself entirely in the background, so that no one should ever know. He's the oddest combination. They're level-headed fellows out there in Canada—the company-promoters and financiers; and yet they follow the young railway-king like a flock of children. Yes; and some day or other they'll be hearing of some frantic act of generosity——"

"Mr. Macdonald," said she, demurely, "doesn't he inherit that failing?"

"I beg your pardon——?"

"Doesn't he inherit that failing of reckless generosity? I am holding a box in my hands."

"I tell you this, Miss Eelin," he answered her, warmly, "that if Somerled were here at this moment, and if I were to say to him, 'It is the wish of Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig that you go down to the Suspen-

sion-bridge there, and walk out to the middle of it, and throw yourself headlong into the river,' do you think he would refuse?"

"I hope he wonldn't do anything so perfectly mad!" she exclaimed—but all the same her face was suffused with colour.

"I should be ashamed of him if he hesitated for a moment!" the old man said.

"But, Mr. Macdonald," she protested, almost piteously, "that exaggerated devotion and loyalty to an old family name is quite an anachronism——"

"Is it?" he said. "Well, it may be so. Perhaps it does not accord very well with modern sentiments of independence. Perhaps it is only a tradition; but it is a tradition that is faithfully and affectionately cherished, not only here and there among the glens of the old country but among the settlements and the pinewood clearances far across the seas. Why, you know, Miss Eelin, as well as I know, that that devoted loyalty throbs and burns in many a heart, and nowhere more ardently than among the folk whose message I bring to you, from thousands of miles away—"

"It puts one into so false a position!" she said. "So much is expected of you. It's all very well for Lochiel or Cluny: they can do so much for their people; but what can my mother and I do for the scattered remnant of the House of Kinvaig? We can appreciate their kindly affection—so simple and earnest it is; but what can we offer them in return? We are but the shadow of a shade. We have no power or influence—"

"Ah, but you might have—you might have," he

half-muttered to himself, "if some of those fanatic Macdonalds of Ontario had their way."

As Eelin walked quickly home that evening, safeguarding her resplendent treasure in the blue box, she found herself unexpectedly furnished with a protector. He was a small, dark, iron-grey terrier, with alert and intelligent eyes and alert and expressive ears; and, having apparently dropped down from nowhither at all, he forthwith proceeded to take possession of her. But he was a very cunning little dog. At first he would not even look at her; he merely walked ahead of her, some four or five yards being between them, his deportment of the gravest, like that of some miniature major-domo. Only once or twice was there a swift, half-concealed backward glance, to make sure she was coming; and occasionally there was a low growl sent forward, as a warning to evil-doers to be gone. Now this was perplexing; for she was always getting into trouble through stray dogs following her home—old Maxwell the gardener having to waste hour after hour in seeking for owners; while as for summarily dismissing this small and important person who had become her self-elected champion, she could not think of so wounding his dignity—probably he was a contributor to the *Spectator*. Accordingly she tried his own stratagem; she feigned not to see him; she halted, and leaned an arm on the iron rail, and looked abroad and across the wide-shivering silver stream, to the far row of elms that spread themselves fan-like against the glow of the western skies. She listened to the hammering of the workmen in the distant enclosure—to the muffled calling of children in still remoter playgrounds. And then she came back—warily

—warily—only to find that the little iron-grey terrier was still there, stealthily and steadily watching her with vigilant and sagacious black eyes.

And then, throwing off deceit and wile, she strode forward to him, and addressed him in angry tones:

"Now, Peterkin, I tell you it's no use; it's no good your pretending to be a friend of mine, for I never saw you before. Why don't you go away home? If you come with me, do you know what will happen? You'll be locked up in the tool-house; and I'll have to pay for an advertisement in the *Observer;* and the people who own you will come out grumbling and saying they never wanted any advertisement. Go away, do you hear? Go back into the town—off—off!"

Now the effect on Peterkin, if such were by accident his name, of this objurgation was most surprising; it seemed to send him into a perfect ecstacy of delight. He squirmed and grinned, and grovelled; he danced about; he clutched the earth with outstretched deprecating fore-paws, and buried his nose in them; he wriggled his body like an adder swimming across a salmon-pool; then his murmuring whines broke into one or two joyous yelps, as he made a dash upward, to meet the expected caress of her hand.

"Come, come," said she, severely, "this nonsense won't do at all. I must be getting on, whatever you may be after."

But the moment she resumed her route he again and instantly took up his position as guardian, walking in advance of her with important demeanour, and ever and again turning round as much as to say "You trust to me. Don't be afraid. I'll keep the road clear for

you." In especial his eye was fixed on three half-bred fox-terriers which, at the near end of the Suspension-bridge, were slowly walking round each other with tails stiffened and erect. A general outbreak of war seemed imminent; but Peterkin did not deign to intervene; he maintained an attitude of calm observation; if he and his mistress were allowed to go by in peace, he would not seek to join in a vulgar squabble. Far otherwise was it when his attention was claimed by the other side of the river; for there indeed were lions in the path—a huge St. Bernard and a large black retriever, that were idly wandering about the further end of the bridge, and that at once awoke his ire. He growled to bid them depart. Then, seeing they took no heed, he flew down the grassy bank to the water-side, and a series of explosive barks rang out across the stream, cutting the air with their shrill anger. And then he trotted back to his post, looking up as he went by to his mistress for a word of approval.

"Yes, it's all very well, Peterkin," said she, to her valiant champion, "to challenge big dogs when they're on the other side of a wide river—that is wise and prudent. But you forget that we have to cross the Suspension-bridge, and that either of those animals can just snap your head off if it likes."

However, as it turned out, the large, slow, melancholy-eyed St. Bernard and the fat and curly old retriever paid no attention to the courageous Peterkin, who, on Eelin's arrival at Glengarva House, was forthwith handed over to the ministrations of Maxwell the gardener. Maxwell declared him to be a young dog of a most famous and valuable breed; and knew there would

be handbills all over the town on the following Monday; there was no need for Miss Eelin to encroach on her pocket-money for any advertisement. And so promising Peterkin to come and take him out for a stroll on the intervening day, she went into the house. Her heart, that had been cheered up a bit and interested by this little adventure, seemed now to sink somewhat: the prevailing silence appeared to be a silence of foreboding.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CROSS-PURPOSES.

When mother and daughter met in the drawing-room before dinner, they regarded each other askance and apprehensively—for the first time in their lives.

"I have a message for you, Eelin," said the former; "an important message, from Mountmahon. It is a proposal of marriage."

The poor woman was trembling a little: it was the girl who was outwardly calm.

"Yes?" said Eelin. One could have imagined that she was somewhat taller than her wont: perhaps it was the proud set of her head.

"And he wished me to plead his cause for him," the mother continued. "Of course, I will not do that; I cannot do that. The decision must be entirely your own. You must be left wholly unbiassed. There is nothing I would not dare or risk for you, Eelin, as you know; but not this—not this! Neither for nor against have I a word to say."

Curiously enough, by mere accident and absently and

aimlessly Eelin had stepped up to the framed Genealogical Tree of the Macdonalds and Macdonells, beginning with the Argyllshire Thane who married the Daughter of the King of the Isles; and she was vaguely contemplating the long ramifications, even up to the loftiest branches, where perhaps some day, in one of those small circles there might have to be inscribed *Eelin Macdonald, married*——

"But surely, mother," she said, slowly, "you ought to tell me what you yourself expect of me. Perhaps even what others might expect. I suppose if you inherit an ancient name, there are duties attached. I suppose it would be cowardly to avoid—to avoid—something of personal sacrifice, if that were demanded. I daresay one owes something to one's family—to the family history——" She had been talking as if in a reverie; but of a sudden she appeared to come back to herself and her actual surroundings; and there was a natural ring of scorn in the next few words: "But at least, mother, he might have waited till the earth had settled on his wife's grave!"

"My dear child!" said the mother, imploringly. "Why will you give way to such violent prejudices? I did think you might be able to make allowances, and be a little generous. Lord Mountmahon has been a spoilt child all his life—that I have always heard. Too soon his own master, never any proper training or proper companions: how can you wonder that he should be impatient and headstrong? And mind you this, Eelin, his very impetuosity may be a compliment to yourself; and he is quite willing that if you only give him a favourable answer, the formal and open wooing may be

as long as ever you like. At all events, he says so, though I imagine his habit of carrying everything before him would reassert itself, and he would be for having a speedy wedding—"

"Mother—mother!" the girl cried, as if she had been struck.

"No, no, I should not have said that!" the mother responded at once—so piteously eager was she that her daughter should have this proposal placed fairly and dispassionately before her. "Probably it would not be so. No doubt he would wait a fitting time. His hurry to get a telegram or post-card sent down to Kinvaig—well, that is easily to be understood. And I did not undertake that you would give him your answer at once—though he pleaded for it. Yes, I must admit that his manner—the sincerity of his manner—impressed me a little. I confess that. And I liked the way he talked about himself. There was a kind of blunt honesty about it that rather made you sympathise—as if with one who had been hardly treated by common rumour. Now I am not arguing on his behalf, Eelin; nor am I seeking to influence your decision—God forbid that I should do that!—but I think I ought to repeat to you some things he told me about himself, more especially as regards the future, and what he is willing to do, if you accept this position he offers you."

And therewith the poor woman, so pathetically resolved to be impartial—so determined that no hypersensitive feelings of her own should interfere with what many would consider her daughter's "chance in life"—began and fought against her own secret instincts and sympathies, and blinded her eyes to her fears, and

would have nothing but commendation for Mountmahon's pledges of reform. He was to withdraw from the turf; he was to send his bodyguard of bullies to the right-about; he was to turn over a new leaf, and improve his conduct generally, and become an estimable member of society, if only Eelin would grant him her promise. And perhaps, in her over-conscientiousness, the Bean-an-Tighearn may have spoken as if she herself had been persuaded of all these things. The girl listened mutely, with absent eyes. Then a maidservant appeared at the door, to announce dinner; so that nothing more could be said at the moment.

And again at dinner the same unnatural calm prevailed—the mother dreading lest her specious representations had been too readily received, the daughter convincing herself, by the very earnestness of these representations, that her mother expected her consent. Neither looked the way of the other; whatever was said was uttered and answered in a mechanical sort of fashion; it was the strangest meal. As for Eelin, she sate for the most part silent, and with absorbed eyes, as if conscious of some impending doom.

But after dinner the girl made a desperate effort to break through this constraint; she went away to her own room and got hold of the box containing the coral and diamond necklace; and it was with quite a blithe air that she came into the drawing-room and marched up to her mother.

"Look here, Mummie," said she, "I have something to show you. There was no time before dinner: what I have in this box will want a good deal of examination

and admiration. A present?—yes, indeed!—and something of a present—"

"From Lord Mountmahon," the mother said, quickly.

"Oh, mother, mother—why will you!" the girl cried—and all the happiness she had been summoning into her face vanished on the instant; and she went and flung herself on to the sofa, her face downward, as if in despair. "I did wish to forget—for a few moments—"

"Eelin, my darling!" the mother exclaimed, in the greatest trepidation—and of course she was hovering and nestling over her, with soft pettings and caressings. "Forget altogether! If that is what is troubling you, forget altogether!"

She rose, rather languidly.

"Come here, mother!"

The mother followed her, until both were opposite the engraved family-tree, with its proud display of names.

"How can I forget when that keeps calling to me?" the girl said, in a strange kind of way. "Look. Here are the coats of arms of some of the families that have intermarried with the Macdonalds and Macdonells. You see, there is a corner left. If a new plate were engraved, there would be room. The Savage and the Falcon—these are the armorial bearings of the Countess of Antrim—oh, good enough company—oh, yes, good enough company—if one were to covet a place—"

The elder woman glanced nervously at the girl, and caught her by the hand.

"Come away, Eelin! I don't think you are very well to-night: you must go to bed soon. Come and

show me your present: why, you haven't told me yet who gave it to you!"

She suffered herself to be led back to the central table, and there, under the strong glare of the lamp, she opened the casket. There was a sudden blaze of splendour.

"Isn't it a pity," she said, "that Mr. Macdonald—old Mr. Allan Macdonald, you know, mother—will never see it? He can only have heard of its great beauty—he can only have had assurances about the quality of the stones—he can only imagine it—"

"So it is Mr. Allan Macdonald that has given you this magnificent necklace?" the mother said, wondering and examining and admiring. "But why?—why?—"

"He had been told of the balls next week," said Eelin, "and he guessed I might be going."

"It was easy to guess that," the mother said (who none the less had her own secret fears of a refusal at the last moment). "Of course you are going; here is an additional reason; and I will venture to say there will not be a more exquisite piece of jewellery worn on either of those two evenings. It is the gift of a prince! Happy Eelin!"

"Oh, yes, happy Eelin!" was the rejoinder. And then she plucked up her spirits somewhat—they were never for very long cast down. "Mother, you must help me. For I made such an exhibition of myself this afternoon. I made an awful fool of myself. For you know, the dear old gentleman rather sprang this on me: if there were some words leading up to it, I didn't quite catch them; and all of a sudden I found myself there, like a gaby of a milkmaid, not able even to say 'Thank

you.' And he dared me to utter another word; and then, if I had tried to look pretty, and simper, it wouldn't have been any good, for the poor old man couldn't see; and there I was—feeling like nine different sorts of a born idiot. Then all at once it occurred to me, if I had only a little time, I could send him a message in Gaelic, that would give some kind of voice to what I felt; and he seemed rather to like that idea; and all the way home—only there was a little dog that made friends with me, and kept interfering all the way home—I was making up something that would perhaps tell him. Only, my Gaelic is so common; it's shepherd's Gaelic that I have picked up anyhow; but you, Mummie, you are familiar with the elegances, with the refined and beautiful Gaelic; and if you would help me, we might together send him a neat little note. I've got the rough English already," she went on. "Perhaps I'd better write that out now, and then we can consider the phrases."

She went and got a sheet of paper; and after a little cogitation she pencilled down the words:

My heart with gratitude is like the tide of the sea flowing towards you; but it cannot speak; only, if you go down to the shore you will find all the shells murmuring with what it has been trying to say.

"Old Allan Macdonald will be a pleased man, Eelin, to-morrow morning," her mother observed. "You have not lost your trick of saying pretty things. And now let us see if we can find some expressive Gaelic phrases."

It was a respite, at all events; and for the time being the proposal of marriage was happily put aside, while this small literary exercise was being proceeded with. And then, when that was finished, and when the casket

was shut up again, Eelin said, quite cheerfully, to her mother—

"Mummie, I wish you would buy a second-hand safe and keep it in your room: it's a shame having all your valuables and family relics lying in a lawyer's office in Edinburgh. Not that I am anxious about my beautiful necklace. Oh, no. Set a thief to catch a thief. I suppose you don't understand that this house is protected by the greatest robber and villain and jail-breaker in Scotland? You don't understand? You've never heard Maxwell on the doctrine of the transmotion of souls, then? Oh, I assure you it is most ingenious. According to him, souls go skelping about the universe, apart from their bodies—just as they do in sleep; and when a particular soul comes upon an unoccupied body, it can take possession; and there and then the man who has been annexed in this way becomes the other man. And whom do you think Maxwell is at present? Why, one David Haggart, who was hanged at Edinburgh years and years ago for murder; desperate criminal he was, famous all over the south of Scotland and the North of England; not a jail in the country could keep him in; and Maxwell with Haggart's soul inside him has persuaded Morag that it is a murderer who is talking to her when she brings in the vegetables of a morning——"

"I wish he'd mend the netting over the nectarines!" said Eelin's mother, sharply, "instead of taking up the time of the maids with his nonsense!"

"But don't you see, Mummie, how secure we are with such a notorious malefactor protecting us? Set a housebreaker to guard a house! And that's why I am not anxious about my lovely necklace—though I do mean to

hide it away deep down in a special wee corner that I know of: all the same, Mummie, you might just as well buy a second-hand safe; it wouldn't cost more than £4 or £5; and you could get at your treasures whenever you wanted. And now I must go and see that Beelzebub has not been left in the pantry: I'm getting tired of earthquakes at three in the morning."

That night was a troubled night for the poor mother. Hour after hour she lay awake, fearing that she had said too much, or too little. Had not the impartiality she had striven for been after all a pusillanimous kind of thing? Ought she not to have spoken out her own acute and keen convictions freely? Ought she not to have said: "Eelin, the impetuous and insensate fancy of this illiterate booby is an insult! Come back from looking at that family tree! You may owe your ancestors much; but they do not ask for your personal degradation. It is a great position that is offered you, no doubt; many girls would be proud of it: you have other things to be proud of. And if the Marchioness of Mountmahon might become the benefactress of the scattered Macdonalds of Kinvaig, would they not one and all of them starve outright from hunger and bitter winds rather than see her bearing any such polluted name?"

That was one swing of the pendulum; then there was the other: the poor Bean-an-Tighearn—she of all people—striving to persuade herself that she was a woman of the world, intrepid, not too squeamish, who must have regard to her daughter's material interests, without trivial and over-sensitive qualms. But whichever way the pendulum swung, there was ever in the background a dim and agonising horoscope. For this girl

lived all too strenuously, too vitally, too eagerly, whether in unbridled mischief and gaiety among her friends or in quick and active sympathy with the circumstances of the poor folk she knew. And if her own life were to be blundered somehow—if there were to be disappointment—if she were to be flung back wounded—then the anxious mother foresaw how the wild and passionate nature might dash itself against the rock of human mischance—and there an end. The hours of that night were long.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN ANSWER.

On this Monday morning there was a rare scene of hurry and confusion in the Exhibition-hall of the Highland Home Industries Association; for several consignments had been delayed on their route from the outer isles; and now at the last moment they had to be opened and measured and ticketed and catalogued; and among the busiest of the busy—and apparently delighting in the whirl and rush—was a handsome, fresh-complexioned, energetic young lass who wore in her Tam o' Shanter a sprig of the common heath, which is the badge of Clan Dhonuill, and who wore at her neck a silver brooch with 'The Eagle's Crag' engraved on it, that being the slogan of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig. She was calling to this one or that of the lazy boy-messengers; her mouth seemed full of pins and her hands of blue pencils and labels; and when she turned to her assistant—a young girl who

had been hired from Struthers's shop—it was not to seek for help, but rather to offer it, in the sorting out of diced hose and similar articles. She appeared to be very happy amid all this bustle and pother; indeed activity of any sort was always a joy to this wild creature; and at length she saw cosmos triumphantly emerging from chaos; the very last of the labels had been affixed—and it was not yet ten minutes to eleven, the opening hour.

It was at this point that there appeared at the door a tall, fair-haired young man, who glanced rather diffidently up and down the spacious building. He seemed afraid to enter; and yet everyone was too much occupied to attend to him; and so at last he found courage to advance a few yards and look round. Among all those ladies, and young ladies, and giggling lassocks, was Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig the only one known to him?—at least it was to her he made his way.

"Who let you in?" said she, promptly, as she took the last of the pins out of her mouth. "We don't open till eleven."

"The power of the press," he answered her.

"Oh; you have come to report?"

"Hardly. There will be the official report. But I mean to write a general article on the whole week's proceedings."

"Then you are not a purchaser?" she demanded again.

"I didn't come with that intention."

"In that case I fear you are of no use to me," she said—as she shoved straight some of the heavy webs of homespun that had got awry on the long counter.

"I might say a word in favour of the Association, while I am writing that article," he ventured to suggest.

"And so you might!" she said, cheerfully. "And so you might! Well, if you want to be bribed, come along in the afternoon, and I will give you some tea. Any time between three and five: that's when the quality show up, to talk to each other; but they don't buy much; the real buyers come early—to get their choice. So, *au revoir!*"

He raised his hat and was moving off when it suddenly struck him that the face of the young person behind the adjoining table was familiar to him. The table was in front of a portion of the wall between two windows; so that the dusk had partially concealed her; besides, what attention could Archie Gilchrist pay to any alien object when the wave-blue eyes of Eelin Macdonald were fixed upon him? But now he seemed to know who this was: he went forward and stretched across his hand to take hers; with a "How do you do, Miss Forsyth; I hope you are well!"; and then again he raised his hat and went on. The young woman with the timid black eyes and the retiring manner appeared to be somewhat disconcerted by this recognition; but just at this moment a purchaser—that great and noble creature, a purchaser—came up to inspect, and the incident passed by.

But Eelin had noticed, and as soon as the purchaser had gone away to the accountant's desk, she turned to her assistant whom Lady Helmsdale—herself unable to appear—had engaged for the two days' sale.

"So you know Mr. Gilchrist?" said she.

"Oh, yes, Miss Macdonald," replied the quiet and rather nice-looking young woman with the dark eyes.

"He was clerk in Mr. Struthers's shop; and I am sorry to say that I was the cause of his losing the place."

And therewith, seeing that Miss Macdonald was somewhat interested, she told her the story of Archie Gilchrist having interposed when the brute Struthers was fuming and hectoring; and she added, rather anxiously—

"And many's the time I have been wondering whether he was doing well."

"Better than ever he did in Struthers's shop!" said Miss Macdonald. "Why, he is a professional man now —with a great future before him!"

"Indeed, indeed! But we all of us used to think that of Mr. Gilchrist, so busy he was with his studies," said the young woman. "I'm sure I am glad. Many's the time my heart has been sore when I remembered it was through me he lost his place. And ever since, when my people out at Beauly have been sending me a dozen of new-laid eggs, or maybe a basket of green peas, or of apples and pears, I have taken them round to his cottage, and left them for him; and the old housekeeper there does not know my name, so she cannot tell him; only I wish him to understand there is someone who remembers a kindness——"

"And that is very nicely done of you, Miss Forsyth," said Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig (who was considerably the younger of the two). "Very nicely done of you indeed. And I don't see why you shouldn't continue to leave those little presents, merely because he is quite as well off as he was in Struthers's shop. One is always glad to know that one has a friend somewhere. And you may be sure I shall not betray your secret." The

dark-eyed young woman seemed much comforted: she had not wrought him ill, then, after all?

The next customer was a notable one, being none other than old Allan Macdonald, who was piloted into the place by Angus, formerly water-bailiff. And Angus, as it turned out, was learned in the mysteries of domestic dyeing and weaving; and soon these two were discussing shades of *bealaidh,* and *duileasg,* and *crotal,* and *crotal-nan-creag,* the one man lending eyes to the other, as it were; while Eelin, not having the proper instincts of a saleswoman, stood aghast at the recklessness of the old gentleman's expenditure.

"Mr. Macdonald," she protested, "what can you want with all that cloth!"

"Well, you see, Miss Eelin," he answered her, "when I go back to Ontario, there's many a one will be glad to have a bit of the real homespun, with the smell of the peat in it. And I do not often get such a chance; you are my warrant that the webs are genuine, and none of the Manchester imitations; and Angus here, he seems to know something. And if Somerled and I will be going to Loch Naver in the Spring, we will each of us be wanting plenty of rugs and wraps—yes, and an Inverness cape, too—for the salmon-trolling. What's that, Angus?"

"Ay, it's a grand piece, this one," Angus went on, turning over a new web. "It's a splendid piece, this one —smooth and firm and close: the wind will not get through it, and the rain will chist run off it."

"And the colour?" said the blind man.

"The colour?" said Angus, with a contemplative eye. "Well, I'm thinking it's about the colour of beech-leaves

when they're first withered, and before the wet winter has reddened them."

"How many yards?"

"Feefty-four."

"I will take that piece, too, Miss Eelin, if you please," said the gallant purchaser, not staying to ask the price. And then master and man passed on, for there were ever and again fresh batches of arrivals, whose turn it was to inspect.

At the top of the stone stairway, on their way out, old Allan Macdonald stopped, hesitating.

"Angus," said he, in a low voice, and in Gaelic, "were you observing the other counters? Were you thinking that the other ladies were selling more than our young lady?"

"That I was not observing," answered Angus, in the same tongue, "but sure I am, sir, it's yourself was not leaving Miss Eelin many more pieces to sell. And I am thinking that was a fearful bill you had to pay at the desk."

"Now listen to me, Angus," said the great, white-bearded giant. "It is not seemly that a blind person should be going about pretending to examine webs of cloth; and so for the present we will return to the hotel. But this is what you must do in the afternoon, Angus; for you have the blessing of eyesight. You will come back here, and you will pass along the counters, and you will keep a sharp look-out, and you will discover whether the other ladies have been making more sales than our young lady. And if that is so, then you will come back quickly to me, Angus—do you understand me now? As fast as your legs can carry you, you will

come back; and I will be ready with another bunch of notes; and we will set out at once. Because I am sure my son will be saying that I have not made half enough purchases—when it is Miss Eelin Macdonald who condescends to offer these things. Do you understand me, Angus? I will be waiting for you." And with that they left.

Altogether this was quite a gay morning for Wild Eelin; for among the people who came slowly circulating through the hall, inspecting, comparing, questioning, and buying or not buying, were innumerable friends and acquaintances, with whom she had to exchange a nod or a word of greeting; then she made a very fair disposal of her wares; and there was a certain satisfaction in being able to get through with her work in the absence of Lady Helmsdale, who ought to have been by her side. But in the afternoon, as the crowd increased, trade grew slack, and she had more time to look about her. And now it was that the rank and fashion of the north, who had come swarming into the Invernish hotels for the week's festivities, began to make their appearances; and as the payment of an extra shilling enabled a visitor to ascend into the gallery, where he or she could have tea and cake and a placid survey of the assemblage below, this was the retreat chosen by most of the newcomers. Some very well-known faces were visible behind that elevated rail, as Miss Eelin could espy. And she was having a little more leisure; indeed her gentle-mannered companion behind the table had insisted on handing over her chair, for the temporary loan of which she was abundantly grateful.

Then of a sudden her eyes quailed, and her heart

began to throb with alarm. She had been so happy amidst all this toil and turmoil that she had been able to forget; a certain answer that had been demanded of her had for the time being been thrust aside; here she was safe among many friends and neighbours, whose quick glances this way and that showed the keen interest they were taking in each other. And yet she had been charmed into a false security; for there could be no mistake as to who this was who had just entered; and who now came forward to her, grinning, smiling, wearing his most captivating air. And so elegantly and elaborately dressed he was; Savile Row had done the best possible for his squat figure; the begonia in his buttonhole was a flame-point of colour; while the after-luncheon flush that still pervaded his rotund and flabby and shining features lent him almost a look of health.

"Guessed I should find you here," said he, with a sort of chuckle of satisfaction. "Oh, yes, I heard that Lady Helmsdale would prove a non-starter—the sly old mother-fox!—as cunning as a cart-load o' monkeys—that's what they say about her anyway—putting the whole of the work on to your shoulders, and nailing all the 'Kudos' for herself when it comes to the newspapers."

"I thought you were at Kinvaig, Lord Mountmahon," said Eelin, driven desperately to answer him for the mere sake of appearances;—"that you were not coming up till Thursday."

"How could I stay away?" he asked; and his semi-bemused, blue-grey eyes regarded her with adoration and ecstasy, or were meant to do so. "Come, come, be

fair, Miss Eelin—if I must still call you Miss Eelin. Make allowances for human nature. How could I stay away? What's telegrams? What's postcards? What's some measly old formal message, meaning nothing at all? I want to hear from yourself: and I guessed I should find you; and here I am, at the earliest possible minute —after a snack, don't you know—after a snack, to restore the inner man—"

He looked all round; went off on a foraging expedition, and presently returned carrying a chair, which he placed for himself so that there was no way of escape for her.

"Excuse importunateness," he said, with a bit of a laugh. "But, after all, human nature is human nature, and you can't get over that. You didn't make yourself; and you ain't responsible; and human nature is what it is, and there's no getting over it. Follow your first impulse, and you're doing the right and straight thing; it's only the mugs who cut their feelings to bits and calculate chances. Fire ahead: that's my motto. You only live once; and you've got to eat, or be eaten. It's every man for his own hand. And when I see a tremendous prize to be won, I'm not going to stick at trifles. And it isn't quite trifles, either, what I promised to your mother; oh, no, it ain't; for of course you got all the messages, Miss Eelin, that your mother undertook to deliver—along with the all-important one; and mind you I haven't forgotten an iota; no, I haven't; you can make me a reformed character to-morrow morning, if you like —by one little word. And as for gratitude and all the rest of it, you may trust me; I'm not such a bad kind of chap to get on with—"

Now the confusion and embarrassment from which Eelin Macdonald was suffering was cruel enough—for she knew that, all along those galleries, here and there her friends would be looking down, and could not fail to observe the ogling glances and ingratiating grimaces of this too notorious young man; but she did not entirely lose her self-possession.

"Lord Mountmahon," said she, with sufficient dignity, "surely this is neither the time nor the place for such talk. And I did mean to send you an answer—yes—if—if—you could really imagine it was necessary—after so slight and short an acquaintanceship——"

"Which can so easily be mended!" he exclaimed, in quite a jocund way. "Nothing easier than that. Every day will help. Every mortal day that passes will help. All you've got to say is one wee, wee word; and then we'll set to work to amend the short acquaintanceship. What's the use of hanging back, for form's sake. Can't you read people at a glance? I can—all I want to know of 'em; and then if they're cantankerous beasts, or skinflints, or jugginses, or prigs, or molly-coddles, they may go to Hong Kong, and ten miles further, for me. I think you can generally tell what a fellow is like. Come, come, Miss Eelin; I'm not driving you into a corner——"

"But I think you are!" she said, with some warmth—if her eyes were fixed on the floor.

"Not at all—not at all!" he said, good-humouredly. "Only a little gentle pressure: so that I may carry away with me some inkling as to what is going to happen—to cheer my lonely absence, until I return on Thursday. I'm not a poetical gent, don't you know; but I could say

something about those splendid eyes of yours, if this were a proper occasion——"

"It isn't, then!" she said, in downright anger; and she rose abruptly, and took the chair on which she had been sitting, and handed it back to Miss Forsyth, who had been discreetly non-observant all the while. Then Eelin crossed to the counter and stood there, by her piles of homespun.

And of course Mountmahon instantly followed.

"I know it isn't quite the best occasion," said he, "but human nature is human nature, and you can't get over that: and I wanted to take away with me some little assurance. Sorry if I've seemed rather importunate; but 'persistare' is a good motto, don't you know; and I'm in a bit of a fix at the moment, for my lads are in a brake outside, and they're apt to become a deuce of a noisy crew when they're kept waiting. But look here, my dear Eelin, if you won't say anything outright, if you're afraid of being overheard, what's the matter with this? A couple of words now——"

He had got hold of an unattached label and also of one of the blue pencils, and these he put into her hands.

"A couple of words now——"

Well, she hardly knew what she was doing, so exasperated was she and ashamed; or she may have had some wild fancy that if she humoured him in this matter he would at least go away; at all events she placed the blank label on the top of one of the webs, and with trembling fingers she wrote these words—

What you ask is in every way and forever impossible.

He seized the piece of paper, looked at it, and professed to be highly delighted.

"Impossible? The very word I like! Suits me down to the ground! Why, it's the only thing worth trying for, the impossible: of course it is. Who but a silly-billy ever took no for an answer? Wish I had another ten minutes to convince you, Miss Eelin; but I must be off —or my boys will be tearing the streets to bits. Tell your mother I am coming out to see her the moment I return. Your mother's on my side, you know; and *persistare* will conquer the impossible, never you fear!" And so, with nods and smiles and parting glances, he took himself away: leaving Eelin Macdonald half-maddened with resentment and indignation, as the circumspect Miss Forsyth could very well make out from the girl's burning cheeks, her trembling frame, her haughty lips, and sombre eyes. Alas! that there should have been other spectators of this incident not so favourably placed for accurate observation as Miss Forsyth.

"I say, Lil, did you see what was going on?" remarked one of two young people to the other as they were on their way out.

"It is not to be spoken of!" answered Lily Neile—who appeared to be distressed.

"But it will be spoken of," her brother continued. "By to-morrow it will be spoken of all over Invernish, and outside it too. Really, now," the tall, sandy-haired youth went on, "who could have expected such a thing, from Eelin Macdonald of all people! Well, of course, one never knew what she was going to be at next—any madcap trick—parachuting herself from the top of the